BOY SCOUTS WITH JOFFRE or, In the Trenches in Belgium

BOY SCOUTS WITH JOFFRE

OR

IN THE TRENCHES IN BELGIUM

By

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Author of
THE WAR ZONE
SCOUTING THE BALKANS IN A MOTOR BOAT :: :: :: ::

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Boy Scouts in Belgium;

or,

Under Fire in Flanders

CHAPTER I.

A Mysterious Hot Box.

On a warm day in October three motorcyclists were speeding over Long Island roads toward New York City. One of the group was apparently setting the pace for his fellows. He was at least a hundred yards in the lead. With mufflers deadening perfectly the clamor of their engines the riders sped across the country like fleeting ghosts with never a sound to indicate their presence.

All three riders appeared to be about eighteen years old and were dressed in the well-known khaki uniform of the Boy Scouts of America. Could one have examined closely the badges upon their sleeves he would have discovered that two of the boys were members of the Black Bear Patrol of New York City. The third member of the group, a lad

slightly smaller in stature than his comrades and with a very freckled face and very red hair, was a member of the Wolf Patrol of the same city. A Black Bear was on the leading machine that seemed to be making the pace.

Approaching the outskirts of a village the leader's speed perceptibly slackened and his machine veered abruptly from side to side of the roadway. He seemed in imminent peril of dashing into a nearby row of telephone poles. Instantly the others slackened speed.

"What's up, Harry?" inquired he of the red hair.

"Crossing cop, maybe!"

"Nix on the cop!"

"When Jack's in trouble, slow up!"

Without a moment's delay both boys shut off power and applied brakes, bringing their machines to a standstill beside their comrade.

Dismounting hurriedly the riders approached their friend.

"What's the trouble, Jack?" inquired the red-headed lad. Then without waiting for an answer he wrinkled his freckled nose in disgust and stepped back with loud sniffs of displeasure.

"You needn't tell me; I know," he cried.

"Somebody tried to take lessons in cooking and burned the water before it could boil!"

Both his comrades laughed at Jimmie's remark. Jack, however, turned again to an examination of his machine with a worried look on his face. Touching the parts gingerly he went carefully over the engine.

"Whew, Jack," spoke up the third boy, "you're surely some loud smeller! What did you run over and why did you do it?"

"I know!" cried Jimmie excitedly. "He's got a hot box!"

"Sure?" inquired Jack teasingly.

"Hope I never see the back of my neck!" declared Jimmie.

"Guess I know now what that freight train conductor out in Montana meant when he spoke of a 'stinker,'" Harry mused.

"But how did you get it?" persisted Jimmie.

"Boys, if you want to know the truth, I think some one was unkind enough to wish this onto me!" soberly declared Jack.

"You don't mean it!" gasped Harry with a startled look.

"I do! When did we overhaul these motorcycles?"

"Yesterday. Each boy worked on his own

machine, and I know I did a good job on mine. It runs like a scared rabbit!"

"All did good jobs! Mine, too, was in perfect shape. But look at that main crank bearing now! It's positively frozen!"

"Ho! Ho!" jeered Jimmie. "Frozen! Why, it's so hot you daren't even touch it! Just see it frying grease this minute!"

"That's the correct term for a bearing that gets so hot it won't let the shaft or axle turn. Maybe you didn't know that!"

"Well, Great Jumpin' Catfishes!" gasped Jimmie.

"It's a good thing Ned isn't here to listen to that slang!" declared Harry. "As leader of the Wolf Patrol, Ned objects to slang!"

"Well, if 'Catfishes' is any more slang than 'Frozen Hot Boxes,' " stoutly decided Jimmie, "I'll quit for keeps. Besides," he continued, "it's a good thing Ned isn't here or he'd laugh at us for a lot of amateurs who don't know how to run a motorcycle yet. I guess 'Yes'!"

"Look here!" cried Jack in an excited voice. Then instantly glancing about as if afraid of being overheard he continued in a lower tone: "This looks to me like a sure case of someone's

having planned that we should have trouble. Feel the grit in that oil cup!"

"Let me see," urged Jimmie, stepping forward to bend over the machine for a careful exploration of the hot oil cup. Presently he straightened, and with wide open eyes glanced in wonderment toward his comrades as he extended a greasy forefinger for examination.

"That's emery!" he choked. "Emery will cut any bearing!"

"Emery!" echoed the two Black Bears in chorus.

"Yes, sir, emery! Some one must have put it there meaning to bring disaster to us. Tell you what," Jimmie went on hurriedly in a hushed voice, "it looks as if somebody had it in for us and we are due to go through the old story of having difficulties just before we reach a stage of success! Someone's trying to delay the Grey Eagle!"

"Let's not mind that just now," urged Jack, "the thing to do is to get this machine off the road and then hasten as fast as we can to the Black Bear Club Rooms to meet Ned. It's only two or three blocks to French Pierre's machine shop. One of you can tow me over

there and we'll leave all three machines with him for the day at least."

"Right-O!" answered Jimmie springing to his motorcycle and starting the engine. "I'll tow you as fast as you can ride!"

In a few moments the three boys were again under way, but this time their progress was decidedly slower. Their course was laid toward a portion of the village devoted to factories. Here was located the machine and repair shop of a Frenchman whom the boys knew well. He had assisted them with his expert knowledge in many of their experiments, and the boys regarded him as a friend who could be safely trusted.

While the boys are proceeding on their errand it may be well to make a more careful observation of them. To those of our readers who have had the pleasure of following the adventures of the lads as related in previous volumes of this series, no introduction is necessary. For the benefit of those who have not become acquainted with the work and play of our Boy Scout friends a word of explanation may not be out of place at this time. Their adventures in the States, in Alaska, in the Philippines, in China, in Mexico, were thrilling

in the extreme and gave many situations of peril from which only the most energetic efforts on the part of the boys themselves brought safety.

Jimmie McGraw, the lad with the red hair and freckles, had been a Bowery newsboy in New York until he had fallen under the observation of Ned Nestor, a well-known member of the Boy Scouts of America. He was of slight build, and though of about the same age as the other lads, was somewhat shorter. His active manner, quick wit and rash boldness in times of danger, coupled with a keen perception and an ability to correctly weigh values, more than made up for any apparent lack in the matter of size. Wise beyond his years, Jimmie always proved a welcome member of any party whether on business or pleasure bent.

Jack Bosworth, who had just suffered the disablement of his motorcycle, was the son of a well-known New York capitalist and corporation lawyer. Like Jimmie, he was exceedingly active. A strict observance of the "setting-up" exercises, diet and health regulations such as had been insisted upon by Ned Nestor had developed in Jack, as well as the

other lads, a wonderful endurance. He possessed a skill in athletics that stood him well in hand when occasion required feats of endurance or agility that might well have taxed the ability of many men older or of greater physical proportions. Jack's dark complexion contrasted strongly with Jimmie's ruddy face and wealth of auburn hair, yet the two lads were warm friends despite their difference in appearance.

Harry Stevens, the son of a prominent automobile manufacturer, was the third of this trio of travelers. His marked ability along mechanical lines had been given full play by his father. Harry's ambition was to produce an engine that would be suitable for use in air craft and that would excel anything heretofore known. How well he and his comrades had succeeded we shall presently learn.

Just now the three lads were hastening to New York to meet at the club rooms of the Black Bear Patrol their chum Ned Nestor, who had summoned them by telegraph from their stopping place on Long Island.

For purposes of greater seclusion during their experiments a hangar had been constructed on some vacant property owned by

Jack Bosworth's father. In addition to being out of the regular line of travel the place afforded the further advantage of being within easy reach of a railroad as well as being near the beach of Long Island Sound. Here Ned and his friends had worked industriously for several weeks constructing an aeroplane along lines conceived by the boys themselves.

On this particular day Jimmie, Jack and Harry had been making the final adjustments on the frame and planes of the new air craft when a message had come over a "pony" wire from the nearby railroad station. Wonderingly, but unhesitatingly the boys had at once dropped their tasks and, at a suggestion from Jack, had chosen to use their motorcycles rather than wait for the next train. A watchman whose services in the past had been invaluable had been left in charge of the hangar and its precious contents. Their start had been without incident, and it was not until they approached the village a few miles from the hangar that they experienced any difficulty. Apparently the run would be a quick one.

At the village, however, Jack's mount had,

indeed, developed a "hot box" which effectually prevented operating the machine.

In spite of Jimmie's threat to tow Jack's disabled machine at a rapid pace he was using a great deal of care and was running slowly. The boys had not proceeded far when Jack called out:

"Cut across lots, Jimmie! Go through the old foundry yards. It'll save nearly two blocks of travel!"

Jimmie's only reply was to nod his head. At the next street intersection he steered his motorcycle toward a foot path which led diagonally across a vacant lot formerly used by a foundry. A thick screen of shrubbery and bushes growing near the walk hid the lot from the view of anyone on the street. Not until they had passed through the opening in the bushes did the boys observe that a group of young fellows of about their own age were engaged in a game of ball on the vacant lot. These lads seemed to be rather low characters.

It was too late to turn back, however, so Jimmie gave a discordant squawk of his horn and held to the path, nearly colliding with a base runner who was sliding for second.

Shouts of wrath and execration rose from the throats of the roughly dressed crowd of players and spectators. In an instant fists were being shaken toward the intruders, while chunks of cinder were wrenched from the ground and hurled in the direction of the cyclists. Coarse threats and foul language were mingled freely with appellations of scorn and hatred.

"Get out of here, you're buttin' into a game!" shouted one.

"Soak the snobs!" cried another, brandishing the bat he held.

"Get 'em, fellers!" yelled a lad, hurling a piece of cinder with poor aim. "Everybody soak 'em good and hard!"

One lad more venturesome than the others hurled a bat at the machines, now almost clear of the crowd. Jimmie had opened the muffler and turned on the power. Mingled with the roar of the exhaust came a sharp musical twanging that told of broken spokes. The bat had reached Jimmie's rear wheel, but fortunately the machine did not collapse under the now uneven strain. In another minute they would be clear.

"Don't let 'em get away!" yelled one of the toughs, drawing a revolver. "Don't let 'em get away! Stop the snobs!"

Seeing that the machines were winning their way to safety, the excited youth pulled the trigger again and again.

CHAPTER II.

Secret Service Duty.

"Great Smoking Fireboxes!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"No, Jimmie, you should say 'Hot Boxes,'" corrected Jack.

"I meant to say 'Great Frozen Hot Boxes,'" smiled Jimmie.

"Here, here!" Harry cried impatiently, holding up a warning hand. "Just imagine what Ned would say if he heard that!"

"All right, when I see him I shall ask his permission to use that as an intense explosive when the occasion requires."

"You mean 'expletive,' Jimmie," Jack again suggested.

"You win the argument!" Jimmie announced resignedly, sinking further into the depths of a great chair. "I wish Ned would hurry!"

The three boys were seated in the club rooms of the Black Bear Patrol and were the only members present. Nearly the entire fourth floor of the handsome residence of Jack

Bosworths's father had been given over to the use of the Black Bear Patrol. All the members had lent their best efforts to fitting the rooms up in a manner becoming the use to which they were being put. About the walls hung trophies of their prowess as hunters and fishermen. Rugs of skins were on the floors, chairs and settees fashioned by the boys themselves offered comfort, while pennants and ribbons indicating prizes awarded in athletic contests were plentifully in evidence.

By great good fortune the boys had succeeded in escaping from the attention of the gang of rowdies they had unwittingly disturbed earlier in the day. Having just time to leave the damaged motorcycles with their friend Pierre they caught the next train for New York, and had proceeded at once to the club rooms, where they now rather impatiently awaited the coming of Ned Nestor.

"Maybe Ned didn't think we could get here so quickly," Harry suggested, moving a camp stool nearer the window and seating himself.

"Maybe he didn't think we nearly failed to get here at all!"

"If it hadn't been for the good qualities of that little 'buzz-wagon' of mine we would be

arguing with that gang of toughs out on Long Island this minute!" declared Jimmie with some force.

"Right you are, Jimmie! You can handle a motorcycle. I'll hand you that. But they nearly got us in spite of your ability!"

"They're a tough lot of lads," admitted Jack. "They work only when they have to and loaf around living on someone else. It is getting to be a caution the way they annoy us, too. There ought to be some way of stopping them. We should see father about it."

"Good idea, Jack! Just now, it's too hot to think about that subject. What do you say to having a pitcher of lemonade?"

"The ayes have it!" declared Jimmie in a grave manner.

A step on the stair interrupted further remarks.

Ned Nestor, accompanied by an older man whom the boys at once recognized as Mr. Nobles, an attorney associated with Jack's father, came into the club room, glancing quickly about with a worried look on his usually bright and sunny face. His dark eyes were positively somber.

"Guilty, your Honor, as charged in the indictment," gravely remarked Jimmie in greeting as he rose to his feet and lifted his right hand. "I'm guilty. My alibi's no good!"

A general laugh went round the group as this characteristic greeting was given. The boys noticed, however, that Jimmie's hand formed the well-known Boy Scout signal, and also detected the quick lift of the lawyer's hand with the palm outward, the thumb and little finger touching and the other three fingers extended upward. Instantly they all followed suit and then a general handshake followed.

"And now, Ned," began Jimmie as they all took seats, "why the 'four-eleven'? Somebody trying to run away with the town?"

"It looks mighty serious!" Ned soberly replied.

"Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" ejaculated Jimmie.

"What's that?" inquired Ned, instantly half rising.

"I've got a new 'by-word,'" Jimmie hastened to explain. "I'm using it only on special occasions, such as getting shot at or some

little thing like that, or having a motorcycle put out of business."

"That's fine!" ironically declared Ned. "Now we'll omit the special occasions and it will be all right. Where did you get it?"

"Where Jack got his real hot box!" declared Jimmie.

In answer to Ned's puzzled looks the boys quickly detailed the events of the morning. Their previous experiences had taught them to overlook nothing no matter how trifling it might at first appear.

A big pitcher of lemonade was prepared and passed about, to which the attorney helped the boys do full justice.

"Now," began Jimmie, as the pitcher was emptied and he sat with a huge slice of lemon in each hand, "can't you do something to stop that gang of rowdies out there? They bother us a lot! Only the other day they threw several milk bottles into the road in front of our machines. The broken glass nearly cut our tires to scrap!"

"Possibly I might hire a detail of guards to protect you and make the lads stop," laughingly decided the attorney, "but they'd only stop while the guards were there. If you stop

them yourself, Jimmie, they'd stop while you are there! See the point?"

"I'll think about that!" declared Jimmie, sinking back into the big chair and meditatively chewing on a lemon rind.

"But, Ned," protested Harry impatiently, "we're anxious to hear the story of this hurry call. What's the reason for such haste?"

Ned's face, which had cleared somewhat, again became grave.

"I wanted you boys to help me. I need your advice."

"We're the regular little advisers!" stoutly maintained Jack. "What we don't know we can find out from Jimmie and his dream book!"

"You're wonderfully kind. This case needs more than a dream book, I'm afraid. It looks to me like international complications, with some treason and a few other things on the side!"

"Whew, what big words!" gasped Jack. "Why don't you give the case right over to the Secret Service Department and be done with it?"

"Because it isn't considered polite to return presents!"

"Do you mean to say——?" began Jack in astonishment.

"Just that!" nodded Ned. "The Chief has asked me to take this case in hand and make an attempt to forestall a dangerous man in his suspected attempt to sell out the United States!

"This fellow is a 'bad man' who has been engaged in various enterprises of a very suspicious nature whereby he always made money. He has a reputation for being a 'gun-runner' and an opium smuggler, as well as several other things that are decidedly not nice.

"His latest act is the alleged theft of some plans of the defences of the Panama Canal, and it is thought that he is going to try to get across the Atlantic and endeavor to sell these plans to one of the nations now concerned in the European war! What makes it worse is that he is a naturalized citizen of the United States, is a trained military man as well as a navigator, and knows that he is wanted to the extent of a very handsome reward. He's a desperate man."

"Then all we've got to do is run out and pick

him up, return him to the United States Marshal, take a receipt and collect?"

"That's all!"

"Fine!" put in Harry. "Do we visit the burning mountains of Mexico again or go to the North Pole or into Death Valley?"

"Worse than any of those!" soberly declared Ned. "It looks as if we'd have to go across the Atlantic and get mixed up in the scrap over in Europe if we get our man! He is reported to have left Colon some days ago and, if indications are correct, is now on the Atlantic ocean bound for the other side where he hopes to sell the plans."

"And the Chief hands us a package like that? Kind of him, I must say!" Harry rather indignantly answered. "No older men handy?"

"He asked me to take the case," returned Ned. "If you boys want to help me, all right. It's a dangerous mission, and you are not required to go. There's no disgrace if we fail, and there may be no little credit if we succeed. But he's a dangerous character!"

"Let's get out the big car and take a ride around the park to settle our brains," suggested Jack. "I'm all in a whirl!"

Gleefully accepting the proposition, the entire party made for the garage. Jimmie alone pleaded that he was hungry and asked to be excused from the trip. He declared that Wolves were always hungry, especially red-headed ones, and that he would await the boys' return to the club rooms. Accordingly he was left behind.

A ride through the pleasant scenes of Central Park did much to relieve the boys of the strain under which they had been laboring during the earlier part of the day. They were accompanied by their friend the attorney, who thoroughly enjoyed their company.

"We'll have the engine in place tomorrow," Harry announced joyfully, "and then maybe we can plan to take the aeroplane along!"

"It seems to be settled, then, that we shall undertake the mission?" inquired Ned, much relieved to note the attitude of his chums in the matter. "This is volunteer service, remember!"

"Do you think for a minute that we'd see you undertake a trip of this kind and remain quietly at home?" asked Jack, dividing his attention between the car and Ned. "Why, Ned, Old Scout, we couldn't think of such a

thing. It's enough for us if you decide to go anywhere. We'll trail along and do what little we can to help!"

"That's the talk, Jack!" declared Harry heartily. "We're with you, Ned, on anything you see fit to undertake!"

"If the 'Grey Eagle' only comes up to our expectations," Ned hesitated, "I'd not be afraid to cross the Atlantic in her!" Then, turning to the attorney, he continued: "The new airship is expected to mark a revolution in aerial navigation. We've been working on it this long time, and tomorrow sees the installation of the engines."

"Yes, sir," gleefully put in Harry, "that little craft has greater lifting power than any aeroplane of which we have any record. It handles better than a Taube or a Voisin or a Curtiss, and we have had a twenty-four-hour trial of her with the old engines while we were carrying nearly nine hundred pounds weight besides we four boys!"

"It's simply marvelous," put in Jack, "the way the craft handles. In the fuselage is room for we four comfortably, and on occasion we can crowd in two more, with plenty of room for stores. Not an inch of space is wasted, but there is no crowding."

"To what do you attribute this wonderful lifting power and the other remarkable qualities?" inquired their friend.

"Principally to the way the planes are set and balanced," replied Jack. "That is the idea of Ned, here. He has been studying that end of it ever since he shot the eagle on the cliff in California. Really, it is remarkable! Then, with the new engine that Harry has designed, we should be able to make a twenty-four-hour flight as a matter of course, instead of considering it a remarkable matter!"

"Come, come, Jack," protested Ned, "you take none of the credit yourself, when you know full well that your share in the affair was not a small one. But let's get back to the club rooms. Jimmie The Wolf will have satisfied his appetite by this time."

Accordingly, the car was turned toward home, and in a short time the party again ascended the stairway to the club rooms.

Imagine their astonishment to find that Jimmie was not there!

For a long time they sat about the rooms discussing the equipment needed for the trip. Details of the case were gone over again and again and discussed from all angles. Intense

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For a long time they sat about the rooms discussing the equipment needed for the trip. Details of the case were gone over again and again and discussed from all angles. Intense

interest was manifest on the part of all the boys as they talked.

A stumbling step on the stair interrupted their talk.

Covered with blood, his clothing in tatters, Jimmie half fell into the room, reeling toward a chair in utter exhaustion.

"Well, Great Frozen Hot Boxes, I stopped 'em!" he cried.

CHAPTER III.

Jimmie Stops a Gang.

Jimmie apparently forgot his hunger as his chums in the big motor car left the vicinity of the Black Bear club rooms. Casting aside the lemon rind upon which he had been meditatively chewing while they were present, he stepped to the window to watch their departure. Assured that they were safely out of sight, he dashed madly down the stairs with hair rumpled and jacket but half buttoned.

Not many minutes passed ere he was seated in one of the numerous east-bound trains on the Long Island Railroad. His destination appeared to be the station nearest the hangar where the boys had located their workshop. His impatience at the frequent stops increased as the distance lessened. He could scarcely sit still.

With his lower lids puckered up into a straight line, drawing crow's feet about the corners of his usually wide-open, frank blue eyes, with little lumps of hard muscle pro-

truding from the corners of his jaws, and a bright flush showing in his cheeks underneath the ever-present freckles, Jimmie looked very unlike the merry lad his chums were so well accustomed to greet. He was plainly angry.

Scarcely had the train halted at the station where the boys had experienced their difficulty with the motorcycle earlier in the day before Jimmie dropped off. He ran a few steps quickly, then forced himself to a walk. Again he started to run.

"Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" murmured the lad, as he strode rapidly along the nearly deserted street. "If Ned could see me now he'd call me to a finish! That's slang, I know, but it goes today!"

Turning a corner, Jimmie slowed his pace a trifle until he came near the vacant lot marking the scene of the encounter with the gang of ruffians. Apparently controlling himself with an effort, the boy walked along the fringe of bushes that hid the lot from passers-by. A glance through an opening showed him that the lot was not deserted. Apparently the same group of young fellows occupied the place. Their game of ball, however, had been finished, and they were gathered about a

rudely constructed shelter before which blazed a small fire. In a tin bucket simmered a stew of vegetables and meat. All were intently watching the cook's operations.

"Howdy do, gentlemen!" Jimmie quietly said as he neared the group. Several jumped up in amazement, for all had been too absorbed to note the advent of the newcomer.

"Well, what do you want, now?" demanded one of the lads, addressing Jimmie in a gruff tone of voice with a note of menace.

"I'm looking for your captain, or whatever you call him," announced Jimmie in even tones that belied the feelings surging within his breast. Not a hint did he give of the storm within.

"This ain't no time to be runnin' around disturbin' us!" growled the spokesman. "You've done enough of that already!"

"That's just what I wanted to speak about, if you please," replied Jimmie in his most suave tones. "I feel that there has been too much interference already, and I wanted to square things!"

"Oh, you do, do you?" roughly demanded another lad of burly proportions, shoving his way through the group now gathered in a

close knot. "Who give you any license to be runnin' around squarin' things? I don't see any streets named after you!"

A hot retort was on Jimmie's lips, but he choked it back.

From the rear of the crowd came the voice of another lad who, following the instincts of his kind, was ready to give advice, but slow to follow it with actions of his own:

"Soak de guy, Pete. He's too lippy, anyhow. His whole gang's too fresh! Dey tink dey can run us 'cause dey got money!"

"Sure, soak him!" cried another, edging forward.

"If you'll let me know which one of you is captain or leader of your gang, I'll talk business with him!" announced Jimmie, not a particle disturbed by the rough talk and menacing attitude of the tough characters whom he confronted.

"I'm de captain of dis bunch!" announced the burly lad boastfully. "If you got any squarin' to do you better take us all down to de corner and set 'em up for de whole lot of us!"

Ignoring the suggestion that he buy refreshments for the entire gang, Jimmie faced

the lad squarely, and, although his height was much less than that of the fellow whom he addressed, he took a step forward and looked fearlessly into the other's eyes.

"There's been a lot of rough stuff pulled off lately," Jimmie stated in a low tone. "Somehow, we've been unable to travel back and forth without running foul of you or your friends. Purely by accident we have had the misfortune to incur your displeasure and——"

"Sure, you pulled rough stuff," interrupted the self-styled captain. "You've pulled too much of de rough stuff. You got to quit!"

"That's just what I'm here for!" snapped Jimmie, dropping the suave manner. "I came back purposely to put a stop to it."

"Well, stop it and get out!" returned the other.

"Surest thing you know," gritted Jimmie, "I'll stop it if you've got sand enough to give me a chance. I don't suppose I can handle the whole gang of you, but if you're Americans you'll pick out a man to represent you, and I'll stop him. If I do that, you are to agree that your gang lets us alone. If he stops me, we'll pull up stakes and stay away from this section. Is that fair?"

A general laugh went up around the group at this offer, for Jimmie was much smaller than many of the boys, and the proposition appeared so ridiculous that they could not at first believe he could really mean to challenge any of them to combat.

"Sure thing," jokingly remarked one of the lads at length, "take him on, Pete, and break him in two. We'll see fair play!"

"Is it a go?" asked Jimmie, unbuttoning his jacket.

"Why, kid," warned the one addressed as Pete, "you better run home and tell your mother to wipe your nose. This ain't no place for a nice little boy like you. You'll get stepped on!"

"You're not able to do that!" flashed back Jimmie, paling with anger. "Your feet are big, but not big enough!"

"Now, don't get personal, or I'll have to hurt you!"

Jimmie's jacket and hat were on the ground. He stood erect, keeping a watchful eye on the group gathering more closely.

"Come on, now," he offered, "I'm giving you a fair chance. If you fellows want to be square and right, pick out one of your gang,

and if I lick him, we win. If not, you are welcome to the town. This trouble has got to stop some time, and it might as well be now!"

"You guys started it, anyhow!" declared Pete, with an air of injured innocence. "We ain't done nothin' to you!"

"You don't call throwing milk bottles into the road to cut our tires anything, then? Maybe you don't call it anything to throw a bat into my machine or to shoot at us?" queried Jimmie.

"Aw, go on!" sneered Pete, loftily. "You're too little!"

"You're a coward!" declared Jimmie, stooping as if to pick up his jacket and hat. "You're a big bluff! You're afraid!"

"You're liar!" retorted the larger lad, adding an epithet of extreme insult as a final rejoinder.

Like a flash Jimmie straightened from his crouching posture. Without pausing to recover his poise he shot out a stinging blow that landed on the jaw of the bluffing braggart with a resounding smack. It was followed by another of equal force. Under the unexpected onslaught the lad dropped in his tracks. A gasp went around the group.

"Now," announced Jimmie hoarsely, "I'm going to lick somebody, if it takes in the whole gang of you. If you've got a scrapper in this bunch, trot him out, and let's get this thing settled!"

"I'll take you on!" announced another lad, stepping forward.

"I'm trusting to you fellows to see fair play!" announced Jimmie, watching his new antagonist closely. "Are you ready?"

"You bet!" airily replied the new champion. "Come on!"

And Jimmie did "come on." Like a whirlwind he went after the larger lad with a vim that kept him on the defensive.

Shortly blood was trickling from an injured nose, while cut lips indicated where Jimmie's vicious left had reached the target. From the very first it was apparent that the larger lad had none of the better of the argument. His very weight told against him, in that he was not able to move about as quickly as his lighter antagonist.

Fighting rapidly but cautiously, Jimmie dodged heavy swings, always coming back with a return that carried a sting. He was playing a game that he had learned years be-

fore when it had been necessary for him to protect his corner on the Bowery from the encroachments of other newsboys. In these encounters he had learned the truth of the old saying that "continual dropping will wear away a stone," although he would not have put it exactly that way.

His theory was that if a telling blow were landed early in a fistic encounter, another in the same place would accomplish more than if planted in another spot that was not already sore. Therefore, he endeavored to play for one spot, while his antagonist scattered his attention to any portion of Jimmie's body that he thought might be reached. Oftener than not Jimmie was well out of reach by the time his opponent arrived. In this manner the smaller lad kept up a continual rain of light jabs, waiting for an opening at the other's jaw. His theory was soon proven correct.

Becoming enraged at his unsuccessful attempts to land a knockout, the larger lad at length tried to rush Jimmie. This, apparently, was just what was wanted. A sidestep, a quick forward lunge, accompanied by a lightning-like hook, and the bully went down to stay. Jimmie's fist had connected squarely.

Absorbed in watching the defeated lad, Jimmie had failed to observe that Pete had regained his feet. Too late to protect himself, he realized his danger. A terrific smash full in the face felled the Wolf, to the cheers of some and shouts of disapproval from others.

"Cut it, Pete! Play square! Have a heart!" some shouted.

Although staggered by the unexpected and brutal attack, Jimmie lost no time in getting to his feet. Exhausted by his recent battle, and with no time to recover his wind, the lad was scarcely a match for his burly foe. Employing all the tricks of which he was master, he managed to avoid the other's rush, but was compelled to take severe punishment, in exchange for which he offered little aggressiveness.

Directly an opening appeared, to Jimmie's delight. One straight arm punch, delivered with his entire remaining strength, fell squarely on the bully's face. He tripped and fell backward, landing bodily on the kettle wherein the boys had been cooking their stew.

Several of his comrades hastened to rescue

their fallen friend, while others crowded around Jimmie to offer congratulations.

Disengaging himself from their attentions as quickly as he could, Jimmie hastened back to the station and, without attempting to make himself presentable, took the next train to the city. Arriving there he made his way in a taxi to the club rooms of the Black Bear Patrol.

Well nigh exhausted from his severe struggle, the boy staggered up the stairs, burst into the club room and announced his victory:

"Great Frozen Hot Boxes, I stopped 'em!"

Ned jumped to his feet, preparing to go to Jimmie's assistance. He was interrupted by the whirring of the telephone bell.

"Hello! This is Nestor. What's that? We'll be right out!"

Turning a startled face to his companions, Ned cried:

"The watchman says the hangar is burning!"

CHAPTER IV.

Fire and Its Result.

"Get the big car out as quick as you can, Harry!" suggested Jack. "Ned, help me wash up this young Wolf," and we'll put him to bed and then hurry out there. Things are moving pretty fast today!"

Despite a weakness in his knees, Jimmie was already on his feet. With a protesting hand raised to decline assistance, he made unsteadily for the wash room. He would not admit defeat.

"No, you don't!" he announced. "You don't put me to bed while you fellows go out and have a lot of fun. I'm going with you!"

"But you are in a horribly messed-up state! What happened?"

"Get out that new uniform from my locker," Jimmie urged, "and I'll wash up a bit, and be on hand in a jiffy. I'm all right!"

After a questioning glance at Ned, which was answered with a nod, Jack dashed for the locker and produced a clean uniform. Willingly the two lads assisted Jimmie to remove

as much as possible the marks of his recent encounter. Quickly divesting himself of his soiled and blood-stained garments, the lad slipped into his new uniform and dashed down the stairs, fastening buttons as he went. Behind him clattered Jack and Ned, followed by the attorney.

"I'm going, too, if you have room for me," stated Mr. Nobles.

"Hop in," invited Jimmie, "but you'll have to hang onto your teeth, for Harry gets absent-minded sometimes, and drives as if there were no speed ordinances. He likes to burn up tires!"

Not a second was lost by the party in stowing themselves into the big car, which Harry at once headed for the east side. Across the Williamsburg bridge he began to demonstrate the value of Jimmie's advice. The lad dashed under the noses of teams, in front of trolley cars, and through traffic generally in a way that threatened collision a dozen times. However, he was completely master of the car and by his daring and skill avoided accident.

During the time that the congestion of traffic required a moderate pace, Jimmie enlightened Mr. Nobles with stories of Harry's

ability and skill as a driver of automobiles in dangerous places.

"Why, one time when we were out west," he related, "we saw a cyclone coming. We knew that if it ever caught us we would be surely goners, so Harry just got us into the car and started ahead of it. He went so fast that we couldn't see anything at all of the landscape. A man with us thought he'd look ahead, but there were so many chickens and things caught on the wind shield he couldn't see, so he put up his head once to look over. Do you know, we were going so fast the wind actually blew that fellow's teeth right down his throat when he opened his mouth to tell us there was a big canyon right ahead?"

In spite of the nervous tension under which the boys were laboring, they joined in the laugh which the attorney started.

"Where was this, Jimmie, and what car did you use?"

"Up in Montana," gravely answered Jimmie, the while his eyes twinkled. "The car was that same little old 'Scout' we had when we found the 'Hidden Dynamo' that those train robbers used. It was near Kicking

Horse Canyon in the Crazy mountains. Some ride!"

"You'll do, all right, Jimmie!" laughingly remarked Mr. Nobles. "For speed, you certainly have made a record!"

"Hang on!" warned Harry over his shoulder. "We're going to get out of town, as that freight conductor used to say."

For a few miles conversation was impossible. Harry's expert manipulations of the big car produced a burst of speed that would have been positively dangerous in less skillful hands. The boys took great pride in keeping every piece of machinery used by them in perfect order at all times, in preparation for an emergency such as the present, and, therefore, felt no less confidence in the machine than they did in its driver. To the attorney, however, the ride was anything but pleasant, and he was glad when Harry abruptly slackened pace.

At once the reason for this sudden change in speed was apparent. A burly constable with raised hand blocked the path.

"What's the charge, officer?" demanded Harry.

"Speedin'," was the laconic response, grimly delivered.

"Where's your station house?"

"About half a mile ahead," was the reply. "I'll ride."

"Climb in!" heartily invited Harry. "Get into the back seat, there," he added, with a wink at his chums. "Hurry up!"

Scarcely had the officer seated himself when Harry again started the car, urging it to a high speed in spite of the protests from their guest, who was wedged fast between the other occupants.

"We're goin' to a fire!" announced Jimmie impatiently. "If you'll just quit that noise you're makin' we'll give you a fast ride, and then bring you back to the station house right side up with care!"

Regardless of vigorous threats from the unwilling captive, Harry maintained a rapid pace, and was soon out of the village, and in sight of the hangar which the boys had left earlier in the day.

Scarcely had the car stopped before a gate leading into the enclosure surrounding the hangar ere the boys leaped to the ground. Ned already had his key in hand, so that no

time was lost in gaining an entrance. Dashing toward the hangar the boys were surprised to observe a group of lads of about their own age standing about the watchman, who was inspecting a partly burned side of the building. At once these boys were recognized as members of the gang which had been encountered by the three motorcyclists earlier in the day.

Ned paused a moment, swung his hand to his hip pocket, where he carried an automatic pistol, and then advanced toward the crowd.

"What does this mean?" he inquired brusquely of the watchman, who stood nervously wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Why, Mr. Nestor," replied that individual, "I was sitting in the little office there by the gate not thinking of any danger when I happened to look out of the window and saw smoke coming up from behind the hangar there. I telephoned to the club rooms right away and then came out here with the fire extinguisher.

"Just as I came around the corner I saw a man squeeze through the fence there where some boards are pried off and then I went at the fire. I guess it would have got the best

of me even then if it hadn't been for these young men who came through the same hole in the fence and helped by throwing dirt on the blaze. They saved the hangar and the Grey Eagle, too, Mr. Nestor. They have done bravely!"

Releasing his grasp on the automatic Ned stepped forward with hand outstretched to the foremost member of the group. The leader, with badly bruised lips and a blackened eye, confusedly extended his hand to grasp Ned's proffered palm. Ned's shake was a hearty one.

"I want to thank you on behalf of the Boy Scouts," he began. "You have given us valuable service and we will not be apt to forget it. My name's Nestor. I want you to meet my friends," he added, turning toward his chums, who had followed him closely.

"We met them earlier in the day," smiled the lad. "In fact, we met the little fellow twice. I remember the second meeting well! He handed me this and this," indicating his injured eye and lips. "He surely is some scrapper, all right, and we're glad to get acquainted!"

"Pete thinks so, too!" announced another member of the group.

With a sheepish grin the boy called Pete now stepped forward, extending his hand first to Ned and then to Jimmie.

"I'm obliged to you," he stated, addressing Jimmie. "I guess it was just that trimmin' I needed. We've been talkin' things over since you left us and we've decided we'd like to join the Boy Scouts if you'll have us. You look pretty good to all of us!"

"Hurray!" shouted Jimmie through his own bruised lips. "Ned, here's a chance to form a new Patrol. What do you say?"

"We'll talk it over," Ned answered. "It means a great deal."

"Well, your fire is out and if you've got a hammer and some nails we'll fix the fence for you and then we might as well go home," volunteered one of the boys. "We can't do any more here. But you mustn't forget to let us know about our joining the Scouts."

Having followed more slowly, the constable now approached the boys.

"Well," he growled, "if you fellows are ready, you might come along back with me and visit the station. But I warn you, no

more speedin'!" Then examining the group more closely he cried:

"Hello, Pete, what you doin' here? You git home!"

"Hello, Dad!" replied Pete. "I'm ready to go now."

"How'd you get here, anyhow?" inquired the constable, who proved to be none other than the father of the lad known as Pete.

Explanations of the day's adventures so far as Pete was concerned were given, wherein Jimmie and his chums received full credit from the now friendly Pete and his comrades. They dwelt at some length on Jimmie's courage and ability as well as his spirit of fairness.

"Well, all I've got to say," decided the constable at the conclusion of the tale, "is that I rode with you fellers and I didn't see no speedin'! If you'll give me a ride back to town, I'll be much obliged. Anybody that can lick that boy of mine can't get arrested for speedin' in this town while I'm constable!"

"Thank you," replied Ned. "We won't exceed the limit in your town unless we know it is necessary. Just now, I'm great puzzled

about the identity of the fire-bug and his reason for burning the hangar."

"Maybe it's some anarchist who's sore because he hasn't got an airship of his own," ventured Jack. "Some folks play 'dog in the manger,' especially if they're down on their luck a little!"

"My dream book," interrupted Jimmie, "says to look out for a tall, short, dark complexioned man who is smooth-shaven and wears pink whiskers and light hair. He is in some way connected with the Panama Canal and hates water! Perhaps he's trying to stop something!"

"A most accurate description of the very fellow!" laughed Jack. "I think I saw him in my dreams last night!"

Ned glanced quickly towards Jimmie. Often in the past he had discovered that Jimmie's insight and powers of jumping at conclusions had been the means of leading the boys out of puzzling situations and now assumed that the boy's jocular manner was simply a cloak for more serious thoughts. Using the deaf and dumb language. he signalled:

"Come to one side. I want to talk to you."

Walking slightly apart from the group now proceeding toward the gate where the big automobile had been left he asked in a low tone:

"What do you know, Jimmie? Did you see anything?"

"Not a thing!" declared his fellow Wolf. "I just happened to have a stray thought go through my head. That's all!"

"That's funny! I was sure you had discovered a clue!"

"No. It just seemed to me to be the only natural conclusion to be reached. Here we are getting ready for a trip in the Grey Eagle. Also you just come in with a story about this traitor who has stolen the plans of the Panama defences. Then the hangar is set afire. Why shouldn't it be the work of—well, some interested party?"

"That's as good a solution as any other we now have," decided Ned, dropping the subject on approaching the gate. "Let's get back to town. I have some important matters to discuss with the boys."

After instructing the watchman in regard to repairs on the fence and the hangar, Ned talked a few moments with the group of boys

who had expressed a desire to become Boy Scouts. Then entering the machine he gave the word to return to the Black Bear Club Rooms.

The return journey was completed without incident. Mr. Nobles declared that he would attend the conference to be held and would then proceed to other work of importance requiring his attention.

Entering the rooms the boys found this message:

"Call Mr. Bosworth on the phone at once. He has important news!"

CHAPTER V.

Jimmie Finds a Spy.

"But I'm hungry!" protested Jimmie. "I'm nearly starved!"

"Come to think of it, I guess you have a right to feel a little gaunt and underfed," admitted Ned. "We ought to get down to Mr. Bosworth's office as quickly as we can, though. He needs us."

"If you'll let me inveigle a little sustenance under my surcingle," Jimmy replied, "I'll go with you as far as you like, but right now I'm so thin that I can't tell whether this pain is a backache or a stomach ache. I'm hungry, I tell you!"

"What do you want to eat, Jimmie?" queried Harry. "Say the word and I'll get it for you if I can."

"Not very much," The Wolf stated with twinkling eyes, "just a couple orders of ham and eggs, five or six cups of coffee, some potatoes, some cauliflower in cream, a little roast lamb, some turkey and cranberry sauce, a side order of macaroni, some stewed corn,

some lettuce with dressing, an order of celery, some Parker House rolls and any other little odds and ends that may be lying around loose. I guess if I could get a little lunch like that I'd be good for a couple of hours or until dinner is ready. You know, I'm hungry!"

"Jimmie, you always were hungry!" declared Ned, joining in the general laugh which greeted Jimmie's modest demands. "If it were not for you and your appetite I suppose we'd forget to eat."

"Maybe so," the smaller lad admitted, "but if that's the case there's something wrong with you. You better go see a doctor."

"What doctor would you suggest that we visit?"

"Go to see my old-time favorite, Dr. Cook!" shouted Jimmie. "Now I'm off for a restaurant. Who's with me?"

A canvass of the group showed that all felt the need of lunch and it was determined to visit a restaurant on the way to Mr. Bosworth's office. In a short time the boys were seated in a nearby establishment supplying their needs. Darkness had now fallen.

"What did Mr. Bosworth say he wanted, Ned?" asked Harry while the lads accom-

panied by Mr. Nobles were waiting for their orders to be filled. "Is it something more referring to the Panama plans?"

"Hush!" warned Ned. "Not so loud in here, please."

"Excuse me, Ned, I forgot this was a public place."

"Yes," went on Ned, nodding his acknowledgment to Harry. "He said that some new developments have been discovered and he wants us to make haste. He asked how soon we can be ready to go."

"What did you tell him? Right away, I hope."

"I think you heard me say we'd do the best possible," replied Ned. "Much depends on the delivery of that engine, Harry, for I'm convinced from what I've read of the European conflict and from what I have been told of police regulations on the Continent that we will probably have to make some quick jumps in order to catch the fellow. It does not seem probable that we can apprehend the man before he gets across the Atlantic," the boy finished with a sigh.

"That engine will be delivered tomorrow morning!" announced Harry. "When our Superintendent promises delivery on anything

you may be sure that it will be there at the appointed time."

"Good!" was Ned's satisfied comment. "There's a lot of work ahead of us if my understanding of the matter is at all correct, and we ought to feel extremely thankful that a good start is assured."

"What's that about a bad beginning making a good ending?" queried Jimmie, rousing himself from a study of the menu.

"You mean to say 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the saucer,'" purposely misquoted Jack, grinning at the boy.

"There's many an egg has quit playing the shell game, too!" retorted Jimmie pleasantly. "Be quiet, boys, here comes the waiter!" he added, unfolding his napkin. "I'm glad to see I have one friend!"

"Speaking of slips," remarked Mr. Nobles, "just take a look at the hungry face of that fellow looking in at the window. He's evidently missed connections with a good square meal for several days!"

"I've been looking at him for this long time," declared the red-headed Wolf. "You thought I was studying this menu to order some more steaks and things, but I've been

looking at him. He's been there ever since we sat down and he's been eyeing us all the while!"

"What does he look like?" asked Ned, who sat with his back toward the window. "I don't want to turn unless it's necessary."

"He's a slight built, rather dark, smooth shaven fellow with a cast in his left eye and a scar at the corner of the right one. Looks like a tough character wearing good clothes as if unaccustomed to them. I should say he's a 'Panhandler' by profession," replied Jimmie.

"Maybe he thinks he's going to beg a meal from us as we go out of this place," suggested Harry. "Lots of them try that."

"Forget him, here are the steaks!" cried Jimmie.

During the progress of the meal conversation turned upon ordinary subjects remote from the project in hand. None of the boys cared to discuss the matter in a public place and by mutual consent the talk drifted to other topics. Shortly they prepared to proceed to Mr. Bosworth's office, where the lawyer was awaiting their coming.

As the boys left the restaurant they looked

about for the man who had been seen at the window, but he was nowhere in sight.

Not long after this they were seated in Mr. Bosworth's office discussing with that gentleman the details of their proposed journey. It appeared that their experience on other trips would enable them to reduce their baggage and other impedimenta to a minimum.

"Now, boys," proceeded Mr. Bosworth after reviewing the points already known, "we are informed by the Chief that the man you are after left Colon by means of a launch. It appears that he must have trans-shipped to a United Fruit Company's steamer somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico, for his hat and coat were discovered in the abandoned launch.

"At first it was believed he had accidentally fallen overboard. Later a drunken deckhand from the fruit steamer, after the manner of sailors, was enjoying himself in Mobile. He confided to one of the Secret Service agents there, who (in the guise of a dock laborer) was on another mission, that his vessel had picked up a man from a launch east of Colon. This party had later been transferred while in the Gulf, he said, to a vessel bound for

some European port with a cargo of cotton from Galveston."

"Then he's well on his way by this time!" exclaimed Ned with a note of regret. "We'll have to hurry to catch him!"

"Yes," returned Mr. Bosworth, "but remember that the cotton steamer is a tramp vessel. Probably her bottom is covered with barnacles and she won't be able to make her usual speed, which at best is slow. You ought to beat him across by taking one of the faster vessels from this port. I've been looking up the sailings somewhat."

"If the trial of the new engine proves to be half what we expect, as we have every reason to believe," Ned remarked, "we ought to be able to have the Grey Eagle dismantled and ready for shipment in two days. That being the case, we could then sail next——"

Loud voices from the outer office attracted the attention of the group. Jimmie's angry tones were heard.

"What do you want here?" the lads heard him ask someone.

A muffled reply from the other was not intelligible.

"You clear out of this or you'll wish you

had!" retorted Jimmie. "I think you're a fake, that's what I think!"

"What's the matter, Jimmie?" called Ned, rising.

With flashing eyes the younger lad entered the room. He had left without attracting the attention of the others.

"Our friend from the restaurant window was out in the corridor with a wiping cloth," replied Jimmie. "My dream book told me that someone was doing a little eavesdropping and I slipped from this room into the outer one. I stood by the door listening until I heard someone there. It was the same fellow and he had his ear glued to the crack. When I opened the door he made a bluff at wiping off the marble wainscoting, but he wasn't quick enough! I think he's a spy!"

Quick glances of apprehension were exchanged by the members of the little group. They were recalling the numerous incidents of the day, not forgetting the attempt to burn their hangar.

"What do you think of that?" gasped Harry in amazement.

"I know what I think!" snapped Jimmie. "I think we're up against an organized gang!

Just one fellow didn't go and steal those plans on an independent footing. Somehow there's either a leak in the Service or else the gang is posted to watch us to prevent our taking a hand in the matter. They're not overlooking many bets!"

"Jimmie, I think you're more than half right!" stated Ned. "But I wish you'd omit the slang just a little more. What's to be done?"

"About the slang?" queried Jimmie.

"No, about the opposition to our trip which seems to have developed," replied Ned. "I'm leaving the slang for you to conquer!"

"What do you suggest, Mr. Bosworth?" asked Harry.

"If I remember correctly, you Boy Scouts have a watchword," was the lawyer's reply. "What is it?"

"Our motto is 'Be Prepared,'" answered Harry.

"And I further suggest that you boys make haste."

"Thank you," acknowledged the lad. "Now what do you say, boys, are we ready to return? We ought to get a little sleep."

"Look around and see that all fire is out," warned Jimmie.

"Thank you, Jimmie!" Mr. Bosworth exclaimed. "That remark reminds me that I nearly overlooked giving you these pictures of the alleged thief. They arrived only today. The chap has used so many names that his last one is not worth remembering. This is his face!"

"With that sharp nose and chopped-off chin, he looks like a rat!" commented Jimmie as the boys inspected the pictures of the alleged thief.

All the boys at once observed the striking resemblance.

Good-byes were soon said and the boys departed. Long after their departure Mr. Bosworth sat with Mr. Nobles discussing the venture, the issues at stake and their confidence in the lads.

Little time was lost by the four in making their way to the hangar, where they found the watchman had repaired the damaged fence and had put everything to rights so far as possible. The Grey Eagle rested lightly in its position under the shelter, as if anxious for flight.

Early the following morning the lads were astir. Breakfast was dispatched quickly and all took up the tasks of the previous day which had been interrupted by the events already related.

Soon a motor truck approached the enclosure, its driver sounding his Klaxon for attention. Admitted by the watchman he drove to a position in front of the hangar, adjusted a pair of skids and helped unload his burden. Ned signed a receipt and the driver then made haste to depart. Just as the truck was leaving the grounds Jimmie appeared.

"Upon my honor as an expert," he cried, "that driver is our hungry spy of last night! How does it come he's out here?"

"That's strange!" mused Harry. "Where did the factory get him?"

"I don't know," admitted Jimmie, "but he's there all right!"

"The fellow's gone now," Harry exclaimed impatiently. "Let's get a little gasoline and turn the engine over. I'm getting anxious."

"Wait a bit," interrupted Ned. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to inspect the machine first? Maybe they forgot to put in the piston rings

or something. Hurry-up jobs are sometimes neglected a little."

"Not in our shop!" boasted Harry. "This engine's all right!"

"Better look it over, anyway, Harry," suggested Jimmie. "Here's a wrench. It's easy to remove the cylinder heads and crank case cover."

Shortly a startled cry from Harry drew the boys to his side.

"Look, fellows," he shouted. "Look what's in here!"

"Candles!" scorned Jimmie. "Two candles in the crank case!"

"Those are not candles!" gasped Jack. "Go easy there!"

CHAPTER VI.

A Murderous Act.

"Guess you're right," admitted Jimmie, picking up one of the objects. "But they're about the size of candles, though. I see now this is wrapped in heavy oiled paper. Besides, there isn't any wick. Why, it bends like a gum drop!" he exclaimed, manipulating the object.

"For pity's sake, Jimmie, let that thing down easy! Do you want us all to be blown to bits? That stuff is dynamite!"

"Huh! Dynamite!" scorned Jimmie. "Why, you're talking like a fish! How'd dynamite get in there? That just came from the factory!"

"Sure thing," acquiesced Jack. "But remember who drove the truck to this place with the engine on it! The hungry spy was on the job!"

"Well, Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" ejaculated Jimmie gingerly, holding the object at arm's length. "If I ever catch him!"

"Lay it down gently. Don't let it drop!" advised Harry.

"It looks innocent enough—just like a big bunch of vaseline wrapped in paper," commented Jimmie, depositing his burden on the ground.

"But for all that, the engine, and perhaps we boys, would have been blown to bits if we had started the machine with those things in the crank case!" advised Ned, approaching the spot.

"We're lucky!" Harry breathed. "How shall we get rid of it?"

"Let's drown it!" suggested Jack. "That's the best way!"

"It won't drown! They use it to blast under water!"

"Then we'd better explode it. Let's take it down to the beach, put it on that old piece of wreckage and shoot at it."

With the prospect of a little target practice this suggestion was accepted by all. No time was lost in securing automatics and ammunition. The boys were shortly at the spot indicated.

"Now, boys, I'll tell you what we'll do," spoke up Jimmie. "We'll pretend that we have caught the traitor and he's been sentenced to be shot at sunrise. These two sticks

of dynamite will be the spy and we the firing squad. This is the wall. Are you ready?"

"Bloodthirsty as ever, I see!" laughed Ned as Jimmie became enthusiastic over the game. "Always looking for trouble!"

"We ought to put a black mask on the Wolf," added Jack, "and give him first shot. Executioners in the olden days wore black masks!"

"I'm no train robber!" protested Jimmie indignantly. "Keep the masks for the other fellows. I'll stand up and play fair!"

"But you'll oblige us by taking the first shot, won't you?"

"Thanks!" dryly responded the lad, wrinkling his freckled nose.

"Firing squad, attention!" sung out Jack in an authoritative tone. "'Tenshun! Ready! Aim! Fire!"

At the command Jimmie raised his automatic directed toward the target. With the word "Fire" he rapidly touched the trigger, sending all eight shots hurtling toward the dynamite.

Mingled with the reverberations of his shots a loud, sharp detonation from the wreckage told the boys that Jimmie's aim had been true.

Pieces of timber thrown high in the air by the explosion came tumbling to the beach in confusion. Astonished, the boys viewed the result.

"Just imagine where we would have been with that stuff in the crank case!" whispered Jimmie in an awestruck tone.

"Let's get back to work and get out of this place!" suggested Jack. "This makes me nervous! I want to get busy!"

Accordingly the boys hastened back to the hangar to still the alarm of the watchman and proceed with the work in hand.

Long before dinner time the engine had been properly located, tried out and pronounced fit. The boys were jubilant at the result.

"Now we're ready to start just as soon as we pack out kit!" announced Ned. "Boys, let's make things hum around here!"

"Let's telephone Mr. Bosworth that the engine's running great and ask him to arrange for our passage," suggested Harry.

"Good idea, Harry; get him on the wire for me, will you?"

Mr. Bosworth was pleased at the announcement. Arrangements had been made, he said,

to secure passage for them on a swift vessel leaving New York two days later. They would thus have ample time for trials and adjustments of the engine before dismantling the "Grey Eagle."

Accordingly the boys worked with a vim that afternoon.

"I tell you what," Ned spoke up as the boys were eating supper at the close of a busy day, "we have been very fortunate so far in avoiding serious trouble. I hope we get away all right!"

"Oh, we're the regular little side-steppers!" gleefully assented Jimmie. "I wish we knew who the guys are who seem to be trying to put us out of business. What is that saying, 'Know about it ahead of time and you've got four arms'?"

" 'Forewarned is forearmed,' Jimmie," corrected Jack. "You seem to think only of boxing gloves and other things like that!"

"If I could get the chap that put that dynamite in the engine, tried to burn the little old 'Grey Eagle' and has been spying on us, he'd think I had brass knuckles on!" stoutly maintained the lad.

"He deserves it, all right!" agreed Jack.

"But how will you manage when you get across the water?" he continued. "Those fellows over there don't understand English and you can't understand French!"

"Why, I'll point to my mouth and rub my belt buckle! Then they'll know I'm hungry!" was Jimmie's reply. "That goes anywhere!"

A general laugh went around the group at this solution of linguistic difficulties. Jimmie's appetite was a subject of general knowledge and many a joke did the boys have at his expense.

"What will our first move be, Ned?" inquired Harry.

"Pass the potatoes!" put in Jimmie.

"After we land," replied Ned, ignoring the interruption, "we'll have to discover whether this cotton steamer has arrived. If she has not, we'll wait until we learn what port she makes. Mr. Bosworth stated that she was the "Nymph" and cleared from Galveston for Le Havre. I figure that we ought to beat her across by at least two days."

"But cotton is contraband, isn't it?" asked Jack.

"I believe it is," admitted Ned. "If discovered, she may be seized and the chase lead us

to another place. We must take a chance."

"Why should cotton be contraband?" demanded Jimmie. "They can't use cotton to fight with! Who'd shoot a cotton bullet?"

"You forget, Jimmie, they shoot the bullets with the cotton!"

"Go on, now, you're trying to complete my education!"

"Fact," asserted Ned. "You see, cotton is used largely in manufacturing high explosives. If all the cotton supply were exhausted there could be no powder or other such explosive made, I understand!"

"What else do they use for making powder?"

"Well, they use a lot of nitrogen and so on. I don't know all the ingredients. Each country has a formula of its own."

"Believe me," announced Jimmie forcefully, "when I get back I'm going to read up on that subject in the encyclopedia!"

"When we get back with this traitor," announced Harry, "we'll all have money enough from the reward so we can go through college!"

"Hurray! When we get back! Shall we

decide which college we'll honor, or shall we leave that for later consideration?"

"Better wait," advised Ned. "No knowing what might happen!"

How true his words were to prove! Could the boys have anticipated the many incidents that were to occur and the dangers which confronted them, perhaps their hearts would not have been so light. However, care and gloomy forebodings had no place in their healthy young minds and they discussed the future only with thoughts of success.

Three days later our four friends were standing in the bows of the Compagnie Generale Transatlantique's steamer "Havre" watching with interest the flying fish dart from the curling waves at the vessel's prow. Already they had become familiar with the vessel, had visited every place from stem to stern and had been favored by all the crew.

Although the rules of navigation forbid passengers occupying the bridge while a vessel is under way, the captain had laughingly promised to give the lads lessons in navigation. To avoid any complications he had asked them to sign articles which would make

them members of the crew and thus permit them on the bridge under his directions.

Accordingly the lads had signed the papers, considering the matter a huge joke, and had speculated on various ways of spending the sum of one dollar each, which had been stipulated as the wage they were to receive for their services as assistant stewards.

"We'll be rich by the time we get back!" Jimmie had declared.

Below decks were stowed the boxes containing their precious "Grey Eagle" and other belongings. At the dock in New York the lads had checked each box as it went on board, noting the number carefully and comparing it with the list they had previously prepared.

Eagerly now they rehearsed every step of unpacking and assembling the airship. A special duty was assigned to each lad so that no time need be lost when they were once ashore in France. Between their excitement over the proposed task, the wonders of the sea and the prospects of the trip before them the lads were busy during all their hours.

As the Lizard Light was passed on their port and the vessel headed to pass Cherbourg Light to starboard the boys felt that their

journey was nearing its end. Imagine their surprise to receive a summons to the captain's cabin which the steward delivered.

Wonderingly the boys obeyed the call, speculating on the cause.

In answer to their ring an under steward received them and admitted them to the captain's reception room. They had not long to wait before the captain appeared, holding in his hand a paper which the boys at once recognized as a wireless telegraph blank.

The serious look on the captain's face filled the lads with apprehension. Wonderingly they conjectured what might be in store.

"Gentlemen," began the captain, "you probably know that I am a subject of the country of France and that war has been declared between that country and Germany?" He glanced from one to another.

"Yes, Captain," admitted Ned, acting as spokesman, "we understand that such is the case and we are very sorry, indeed!"

"It pains me," continued the captain after a pause, "to state that I have information here," indicating the wireless message, "which, if true, makes the situation a very delicate one for you!"

Puzzled, the boys waited anxiously for the captain to continue.

"This message" the captain at length proceeded, "comes from some private individual and, of course, cannot be regarded by me as official. It states, however, that you four young men are German spies. While I should dislike very much to do anything of the sort, it will be my duty to detain you until you can assure me that this message is the result of a mistake. I hope you will be able to do so!"

"That's our friend 'Hungry' again!" declared Jimmie. "Oh, the brass knuckles for 'Hungry' when I lay my eyes on him!"

Wonderingly the captain listened to Jimmie's outburst and then turned to Ned for explanation. It was forthcoming without delay, the boys considering it better to be absolutely frank with their friend. All the important features of their connection with the case were laid before the captain, together with their passports and other means of identification. As a final proof of their innocence of the charge, Ned suggested that the captain send an inquiry by wireless to Mr. Bosworth.

This the captain was not willing to do,

declaring that he was satisfied the warning he had received was untrue.

"It seems," he said, "that this party is determined to cause you trouble and in my estimation there is but one thing you can do to protect yourselves against him while you are here."

"What is that?" asked Ned eagerly.

"Enlist in the aviation corps of the French army!"

CHAPTER VII.

Greeted With Bullets.

"Thank you, Captain," Ned replied after a short pause. "You have certainly treated us royally and we appreciate it. We believe you mean well, but it is a matter of importance and we'd like a little time in which to consider the subject. May we think it over?"

"Certainly!" replied the captain heartily. "You are right! Consider it well and remember that I shall help you if I can!"

"We are now citizens of the United States!" spoke up Harry. "We wouldn't want to complicate international matters at all."

"True!" rejoined the captin, "but remember that you have a bold and desperate man to deal with. Judging him by what I now know I believe he will not stop at trifles. Remember that if you are enlisted in the French army you have the protection of that nation."

"While I don't want to underrate the ability of your army," put in Jack, "I feel that this fellow is a man of ability and cunning and that he would attempt harm to us just the same, enlisted or not."

"But think also of the glory that would be yours if you assist my country in her time of need. You would also be rewarded!"

"We'll think of that, too," agreed Ned. "But we must remember that we are citizens of the United States and that we do not wish to do anything that will draw our country into the war!"

"I shall say no more!" declared the captain. "You have several hours before we arrive at Havre. After you have reached a decision, please inform me and be assured of my desire to assist you."

With protestations of their gratitude the boys left the captain's quarters and sought the seclusion of their own room. There a conference was at once held to consider the weighty subject which had just been presented. All felt that the anticipated step was one of great moment and that more than their own personal safety or inclination was involved. After reviewing the facts now known, Ned said:

"Boys, you are the ones to decide this matter. What do you think? Shall we do as the captain suggests or remain neutral?"

"There isn't any such thing as remaining

neutral!" declared Jimmie. "If there is a fight started a fellow just naturally sides with one or the other and that's all there is to it!"

"Sure," spoke up Jack, "but he can keep out of trouble, can't he? He don't have to mix in where he's not wanted!"

"If we take sides with France we'll have to do scouting and other work for that country against Germany, won't we?" asked Harry.

"Why, certainly!" stated Jimmie with some impatience. "We'll have to go up and find out where the Germans are located. Then we'll come back and tell our friends where they are and they'll drop a nice little bomb over there and scatter Dutchmen all over the landscape!"

"Well, the Germans never did anything to us, did they?"

"They have never harmed us at any rate!" put in Jack. "For one, I believe we'd better go ahead as we are and leave the scrap to the other fellows! Our business is to try to intercept this thief and to keep him, if possible, from getting the United States into trouble. We're here on a mission of peace only!"

"And I say we'd better secure peace even

if we have to start a scrap to get it!" declared Jimmie seriously.

A general laugh greeted this announcement. Jimmie's desire for peace even at the expense of a fight was well known. All the boys knew well his sense of fair play as well as his readiness to settle arguments by forcible means. Not for nothing was his hair red.

"Let's take a ballot," suggested Ned. "Of course, there are but four of us, so there may be a deadlock."

"Not much chance of a deadlock with four votes cast one way!" quickly put in Harry. "I know how you and Jack and The Wolf stand!"

Laughingly Ned handed a slip of paper to each boy.

"Each of you put his sentiments on the paper and drop the slip into this hat," he directed. "Jimmie will count the vote."

Only a few moments were required for the boys to prepare their ballots. A hat was then passed and into it the slips were dropped.

Jimmie at once thrust in a hand and drew forth a folded ballot.

"Number one!" he announced. "Hear ye!

Hear ye! The solemn work of Ned Nestor, Chief of the Wolf Pack!"

"Never mind the comedy, Jimmie! What does he say?"

"He says to remain neutral, whatever that is!" replied Jimmie. "Then this next fellow," he continued, reaching for another ballot, "has made a picture of a potato vine as his sentiments. That's surely some fine artist! That picture makes me hungry!"

"That's mine!" declared Jack. "That's an olive branch!"

"Thanks!" dryly responded Jimmie, reaching for another ballot. "This one," he went on, "has made a picture of the Stars and Stripes!"

"I'll take that!" cried Harry. "Old Glory Forever!"

"Noble sentiments for a Black Bear!" was Jimime's comment. "Now this last fellow has made a picture of a Hawk or a Falcon or an Owl. I can't tell exactly which it is intended to represent!"

"That's your ballot, let's see it!" cried Jack, reaching for the paper. "I don't believe you're much of an artist!"

A friendly argument resulted in which it

was left as a matter of doubt whether Jimmie had intended to draw a picture of the Dove of Peace or the American Eagle. Much good-natured chaffing resulted, but it was decided that either bird would serve as a vote for neutrality.

"Now, Ned, it's up to you to inform the captain that we are much obliged for his kindness, but that we'll stick to the U. S. A.!"

"All right, here goes! Come along with me, boys."

Although somewhat disappointed, the captain received the announcement of the boys' decision pleasantly and took occasion to compliment them on their loyalty to country and principles, declaring at the same time that he would be glad to aid them in any way possible.

With lighter hearts now that their decision had been made, the boys repaired to the deck to watch the approach of the coast of France. Not long afterward they were gazing at the scenes in the harbor of Havre and were greatly interested in noting the differences between the customs of that place and those of New York.

Due to the friendly assistance of the captain, their belongings were speedily passed

through the Customs office and the boys were free to proceed at once with their task of assembling the Grey Eagle.

Ned secured the services of a carter to haul the boxes to a spot favorable for their purpose and after lunch at a restaurant near the wharf the boys superintended the work of loading.

By mid-afternoon the boys viewed with satisfaction the completed aircraft which had been taken to a field a short distance outside the city limits. An interested crowd of boys hovered near to watch.

Just as Ned announced everything ready a motor drew up near their position, discharging the captain as its only passenger. He was greeted with enthusiasm by all four boys and asked to inspect their work.

"I have some news for you," announced the captain after proclaiming his astonishment at the results so speedily obtained.

"Hurray!" shouted Jimmie. "News is always welcome."

"It is this," went on the captain. "The Nymph came into harbor about noon today. She evidently made good time across the Atlantic."

"And what about the passenger?" asked Ned eagerly. "Did he land in good shape or has he been lost overboard?"

"I am informed by the captain of the Nymph," replied their friend," that his passenger left the vessel as they were entering the harbor. A launch drew up alongside and the passenger entered that after squaring his accounts properly. He is no doubt ashore now."

"Then look out, Boy Scouts!" declared Jimmie, drawing a deep breath. "The rascal is probably going to head for Paris at once!"

"According to the Chief of Police," continued the captain, "he has not yet presented his passports for inspection. If he is found he will be apprehended and required to explain his presence."

"That won't help us much, I'm afraid," Ned ventured. "He is crafty enough to keep out of the way of the police for a while. I only hope he doesn't get to Paris or to Berlin before we find where he is!"

"Now I must return," declared the captain. "I have done all I could for you and I wish you every success."

Good-byes were said rather reluctantly,

for the boys had become quite attached to their friend. Turning their attention to the final adjustments of the Grey Eagle the boys soon had everything completed. They were provisioned and prepared for a long flight.

"What is the first move, Ned?" asked Jack, stowing the last article in place. "Do you suppose this thief will head for Paris?"

"Possibly we would be wise to try out the Grey Eagle a bit to make sure everything is all right," replied Ned thoughtfully. "Then if it proves in good shape, we can return and try to learn what the fellow did upon landing. Maybe he's here in town yet."

"In case he has not left town we will, of course, try to get hold of him here, won't we?" inquired Harry.

"I think it would be best to nab him as soon as possible."

"Maybe he has already gotten to a place where he can hide the plans until he finds a market for them," suggested Jimmie.

"He's a shrewd chap, all right," assented Ned, "and we can't tell what he may do. I think we can find the launch that put him ashore and possibly induce the owner to tell us where our friend has gone."

"Unless the French are different from any other nation on earth," Jack laughed, "they are afflicted with an itching palm and if we can give the launch owner a chance to increase his revenue he will be as willing to tell us where he put the thief ashore as he was to do the job in the first place. Let's try out the Grey Eagle and hurry back."

Accordingly the boys took their places and Ned in the pilot's position started the engine. After the first few explosions to warm the cylinders he closed the muffler, eliminating the sound of the exhaust.

A touch of the throttle, a tilt of the planes and the machine began to move forward. Accelerating the speed of the motor and with a greater inclination of the planes the Grey Eagle swept majestically off the earth, soaring into the air above the heads of the crowd gathered about. Cheers reached the boys as they arose.

"Let's circle the city and go over the harbor," suggested Harry. "We can get a pretty good view of the city that way."

"I can get a good view of a monoplane over to the north," Jimmie stated. "It is coming this way, too!" he added.

It was as Jimmie had said. A giant monoplane, resembling in its conformation a great bird, was rapidly approaching the Grey Eagle.

"Let's give him a run, Ned!" cried Jack excitedly.

"Sure!" acquiesced Ned. "We'll show him a little speed!"

Accordingly he turned on power and in a moment the Grey Eagle was skimming along at a great rate. In order to better manipulate the machine Ned inclined the planes and ascended several hundred feet.

"The other fellow is climbing, too!" reported Jimmie.

"Is he gaining any?" inquired Ned, busy with the levers.

"You're right, he is!" answered Jimmie. "He's overhauling us!"

"Well, let him come," Harry suggested. "This is a trial trip!"

"How near is he now?" asked Ned over his shoulder.

"About a quarter of a mile behind us, I should judge!"

"After a bit we'll make it a whole mile," smiled Ned.

At that instant the boys heard a peculiar

whizzing noise. It was followed by a sharp report from the rear. A puff of white smoke showed from the pursuing machine, but quickly disappeared.

"He's shooting at something!" declared Jack.

Ned glanced at his companions. Again the peculiar noise was heard, followed by another report and another cloud of smoke.

"Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" cried Jimmie. "He's shooting at us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Imperiled in a Trap.

"He can't be shooting at us!" protested Harry vigorously. "We haven't done anything to him. It must be a mistake!"

"Mistake or not, I know the sing of a bullet by this time, and if that wasn't one that just passed us, I'll give up!"

"Watch out!" shouted Jack, peering through a pair of binoculars he had hurriedly seized. "He's aiming at us again!"

Again the peculiar sound as of quickly torn silk cloth greeted the ears of the boys. Jimmie involuntarily ducked his head.

"Perhaps we'd better slow up a bit, Ned, and see what this chap wants," suggested Harry anxiously. "This is a warm reception to France, I must say! Wonder if they always do this to newcomers?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Ned as he slackened speed.

"Let's descend a little and see if he follows. Maybe we can land and he'll explain himself. Try it and see, Ned."

"Pick out a good spot and I'll make a landing," Ned replied.

"Here's a good one," Jimmie announced. "Come down in that field by the barn with the thatched roof. See, by that clump of trees."

"Sure I do! But do you notice how the houses are set close to the barns? How neat the country looks from this position!"

"Don't try to get our attention off the chap behind us like that, Ned!" protested Jimmie. "If he shoots again, I'll get sore!"

Evidently the aviator in the monoplane divined their intention of landing, for he fired no more shots, but contented himself with following closely in their wake, although keeping slightly above them.

In a short time Ned had brought the Grey Eagle gently to earth in a vacant field beside the buildings indicated by Jimmie.

The monoplane was circling slowly about, evidently in an effort to make a good landing. The pilot did not seem to be sure of his ground.

Directly the machine had reached the earth, however, the pilot, accompanied by another person, leaped from the machine and with a

drawn revolver in his right hand walked rapidly toward the boys.

"What uniform is that he's wearing?" questioned Jimmie.

"I don't know. Possibly that of the French Aviation Corps."

As the two men neared the Grey Eagle the one in uniform addressed the lads in French. They shook their heads to indicate that they did not understand. At this he addressed his companion.

With the stoop of his slender frame accentuated by the sloping shoulders, his quick, shifty movements of the hands and hurried glances from small, beady black eyes, the other man did not compare favorably with the erect carriage and frank, honest appearance of the man in uniform. Jimmie tapped Ned excitedly on the arm.

"I've got his number!" he whispered eagerly. "That's The Rat or I'm a Dutchman! Look at his chopped-off chin and peaked nose."

"He looks remarkably like the pictures Mr. Bosworth gave us!" declared Ned in a startled tone. "I wonder if it is really he?"

"If it is the same one, we'll soon find out!" declared Jimmie.

Then clearing his throat the lad called out brazenly:

"Well, Old Horse, how's Panama?"

Accustomed as he evidently was to surprises of all sorts, the suddenness of this question startled the man under discussion. He gave a quick start and glanced keenly at the lad. A flush overspread his face.

"The Nymph made a quick voyage, didn't she?" continued Jimmie in an aggravating tone. "I didn't think she could do it!"

Evidently recovering himself with an effort the man did not deign a reply to the lad's remarks. Instead, he directed his conversation to the officer, evidently endeavoring to convince that functionary of something. Apparently he was having a hard time doing so.

At length the officer spoke again to the boys, this time using rather imperfect English. He smiled pleasantly as he said:

"Your pardon, gentlemen, but I shall ask you to excuse my English. I am an officer of the French army and shall have to ask you to show your passports and explain your presence here."

"Your English seems to be all right," answered Ned, speaking slowly and in a low tone. "We are citizens of the United States and are here on a pleasure trip. Our passports will convince you. Will you be pleased to examine them?" he continued, drawing forth a document from his inner pocket. The other boys followed his example.

In a manner that impressed the boys very favorably the officer examined the papers, comparing the descriptions given therein with the lads standing before him. Evidently he was satisfied. Turning to his companion the officer spoke a few words in French, whereat the other turned and made for the monoplone. As he departed the officer said:

"I am sorry to make you trouble, but I have a report that you are German spies. I shall have to place you under guard for a short time while I go for assistance and orders. You will not object?"

"Certainly not!" replied Ned pleasantly. "We will do everything we can to help you to establish our identity. But I wish to ask," he continued, "that you do not let that other fellow get away."

"Why not?" asked the officer in surprise.

"Because we suspect him of having committed a crime in America and it is our purpose to arrest him and have him extradited!"

A look of astonishment came over the officer's face.

"But he gave me the information concerning you!" he protested.

"Ah, ha! Just as I thought!" declared Jimmie with some heat.

"However," continued the officer, "I shall make sure he remains until my return. I shall leave him on guard!"

"Good night!" wailed Jimmie. "The Rat! That's the limit!"

Evidently pleased at his solution of a difficult problem the officer turned to his companion, who came hurrying back from his trip to the monoplane. Addressing him rapidly in French, the officer evidently outlined his plan, for the boys saw a crafty look of satisfaction appear on the repulsive face. He eyed the boys with a disgusting leer.

"I shall be compelled to search you, gentlemen!" announced the officer, stepping forward. "One at a time, please!"

Rapidly he felt the pockets of the lads, but discovered nothing.

"Now, if you please, will you not step into the stable so convenient?" he asked pleasantly as if inviting the boys to lunch. "I shall leave the gentleman on guard armed with my pistol and shall return with my superior officer as quickly as I can. Thank you," he added as the boys stepped toward the stable in obedience to his request.

Adjusting a big bar across the door, their captor called out:

"Await me with patience. I shall not be gone long."

"Here's hoping he falls and breaks his neck!" growled Jimmie, kicking a post. "What a rotten jail this is, anyhow!"

"Wonder what's the idea, anyway?" mused Jack. "This Rat chap seemed to have the officer fellow hypnotized!"

"Oh, it's just the Continental idea of policing a place, I suppose," Ned answered with an attempt at cheerfulness. "He'll return soon with a squad and they'll take us to some place for examination."

"And I suppose The Rat will be on his way by that time!" protested Harry with an injured air. "Or maybe he'll shoot us up a

little first. He's got a gun that officer gave him!"

"If he goes doing any stunts like that," Jimmie flashed, "I'll show him two can play at the same game! I've got my automatic!"

"Where did you have it?" asked Ned incredulously.

"In my breast pocket holster," replied Jimmie. "The brainy officer just punched my hip pocket and forgot that I had this slung around my neck. He's a bright chap, that fellow!"

"Wonder what's the chances of getting out of this place," Jack ventured. "This window looks too small for us to climb through."

"Maybe we could get out through the roof!" Ned suggested.

"I don't believe it," Jack replied thoughtfully. "That roof is good, old-fashioned thatch put on to stay and we couldn't burst through unless we had a hole made in it to start with!"

"Let Jimmie pretend he's hungry and burrow out below the walls," laughed Harry. "Set a full meal outside the place and I'll wager Jimmie would be out of this prison inside of five minutes!"

"I'm going to endeavor to get the ear of our

pleasant looking jailer!" Jimmie announced suddenly. "I have an idea that his beautiful white soul might by some chance be sullied to the tune of a bribe!"

"Don't do it!" advised Ned. "He's not worth wasting time on!"

"But we've got to get out of this hole some way!" protested Jimmie impatiently. "Do we sit around here all night?"

"It isn't night yet by a long ways!" argued Harry. "Keep your temper, Jimmie; we're coming out all right! We're not down yet!"

"I'd like to know what you call it!" Jimmie answered, somewhat aggrieved because his plan was not accepted. "They've got us fast!"

"Listen!" commanded Ned, holding up a warning hand. "What's that?"

"That," cried Jimmie excitedly, "is Monseer Le Officaire on hees r-r-return. He brings wiz heem zee whole French ar-r-my!"

"Not much!" declared Harry at the window. "It doesn't sound like his engine! If this stack of fodder wasn't in the way I could see!"

"Ask The Rat to remove the stack!" suggested Jimmie. "Let me look!"

Although the boys did their best to catch a

glimpse from the window of the approaching motor they found it impossible. However, the noise grew more distinct and presently the droning of the motor sounded nearly overhead. As Harry had said, the reports of the exhaust had a sound unlike those from the monoplane. Evidently a third machine was approaching the place where the boys were held prisoners.

"Let's break out!" protested Jimmie. "This is fierce!"

"Wait a minute!" cautioned Ned. "We'll know soon enough!"

"Anyhow, he's got a hot box!" declared Jimmie. "I can smell smoke and he has landed close by. He's been running pretty fast!"

"You've got a great nose on you, Jimmie!" declared Jack, laughing. "If everything you smell was true, what would we do?"

"I smelled your hot box out on Long Island!" Jimmie returned tartly. "Besides," he added, "my nose is as good as the rest of 'em!"

"Nothing the matter with your nose," maintained Jack, "only it's stubbed and

freckled and wrinkles when you lose your temper!"

"Yes," agreed Jimmie with a laugh, "and it's got a perfectly good smeller inside! That's more than some folks can say!"

"Wonder what our friend The Rat is doing just about now?" put in Harry. "We haven't heard from him for quite a few minutes."

"Call to him and ask him for a drink of water!"

"Maybe he wouldn't pay any attention," protested Harry.

"I'll shoot through the door, then! That'll fetch him!"

"Jimmie, you're reckless!" laughed Ned, knowing full well that Jimmie would not consider such a dangerous experiment. "Perhaps we'll find out in a short time just what is going on."

"Yes, I think so!" agreed Jimmie. "I can smell that hot box again! It is getting stronger! I'll bet he's got two hot boxes!"

At this a general laugh went up. The boys found it impossible to resist Jimmie's droll humor in trying moments. Many times had the lad held courage in their hearts by his comments on trivialities.

Directly the boys heard the loud clamor of an engine which evidently belonged to the aircraft that had so recently approached.

"Now, what's he up to?" queried Harry, trying vainly to look from the one small window. "Sounds as if he were starting away!"

"That's what he's doing!" replied Jack. "Cooled his hot box!"

"He did not!" protested Jimmie vigorously. "I smell it yet!"

"That doesn't smell like burning grease!" protested Ned as he sniffed the air. "It smells more like hay or straw burning!"

"Listen!" commanded Harry, raising a hand for attention.

All distinctly heard a crackling noise just outside the barn.

"Boys, this barn's on fire!" shouted Jimmie.

CHAPTER IX.

A Mysterious Warning.

Ned gave a gasp of astonishment at the statement.

Rushing toward the window he attempted again to secure a view of their surroundings. Driven before a gust of wind a puff of smoke entered, causing the boy to step back choking.

"Can you crawl through that window, Jimmie?" asked Ned.

"Guess it's too small!" returned Jimmie, eyeing the window speculatively. "I'll try it, but I don't believe I can make it!"

Accordingly the lad stripped off his jacket, handed his automatic and holster to Jack and prepared to make the attempt.

"Look out for The Rat, Jimmie!" cautioned Harry anxiously.

"Yes, look out for him!" put in Jack. "It would be just like him to stand to one side and pot you as you drop from the window!"

"I'll keep an eye out for him!" Jimmie answered. "Just as soon as I get out of here I'm going to devote a few minutes to using

the brass knuckles on that fellow! He surely needs something!"

Ned and Harry stood by to give Jimmie any possible assistance in his endeavor to leave the building. A cloud of smoke drifted past the window. The crackling of flames grew louder momentarily.

"That's some smoke!" declared Jimmie, coughing as he approached the narrow opening. "I'll bet the fellow that built this shack never intended to have it burn! Wish he'd made the window a bit bigger!"

"Are you ready, Jimmie?" asked Ned. Then as the lad nodded his reply, continued, "Scoot around in front and let down the bar from the door just as quickly as you can. That thatch won't last long!"

"Sure, Jimmie," put in Jack, "don't stop to put the knuckles on with The Rat until you let us out of here. We'll referee the bout!"

Jimmie did not reply to this suggestion, but shut his jaws with an expression familiar to the boys. They knew that the lad would do his best to rescue them from their dangerous situation.

Jimmie's first attempt to crawl through the window met with unquestionable defeat.

Without a doubt the opening was too narrow to permit him to pass with any degree of ease.

Supported from the floor by his two chums, Jimmie gave a backward glance and shook his head doubtfully, then turned again to the task in hand. It would be a tight squeeze, but he was determined.

Thrusting up one arm he put that through the window first, then laying his head on his shoulder he attempted to push that through the opening. Only with the greatest difficulty did the lad manage to get his head through. Wriggle as he might, he found it impossible to follow with his chest. Evidently the passage could not be negotiated.

"Come back, Jimmie," called Ned in fear. "We don't want you to get stuck in that place if the old trap is going to burn down!"

"Come on back, Jimmie; we'll find some other way!" cried Jack.

By this time the smoke swirling around the stack of fodder had filled Jimmie's eyes. With every breath he drew in great draughts of smoke-laden air until he was nearly choking. Reluctantly he admitted defeat and endeavored to return. That seemed far from easy.

Just as he was about to draw his head through the opening a gust of wind fanning the growing fire dashed a burst of flame toward the lad. Caught fast in the vise-like embrace of the frame the boy could not escape this scorching onslaught. Quickly he jerked himself back, badly lacerating one ear. He was not in time, however, to escape the loss of his eyebrows and a part of his red hair.

"Don't try that again, Jimmie," advised Harry. "It won't do!"

"Much obliged, I'm sure!" coughed Jimmie. "You're right!"

"How about the door, fellows?" suggested Ned. "Do you suppose we could batter it down? It may not be as solid as it looks!"

"Never can tell till you try!" hopefully spoke up Jack. "What shall we use as a battering ram? They failed to leave us anything."

"Pull loose some floor boards," Jimmie advised, wiping the blood from his injured ear. "Get a good heavy plank!"

"Guess not this trip!" said Harry, rejecting the suggestion. "This floor is made of hard packed dirt and there are no boards!"

"If it was lighter in here, we could see

better!" Ned cried. "Have any of you got an electric searchlight with you?"

A quick canvass of the group showed that none of the boys had the desired article. All had been left on the Grey Eagle.

"Pull out that post there!" advised Jack, handing the pistol and jacket back to Jimmie. "All of us get hold of it."

"I'm going to turn in a 'four-eleven'!" announced Jimmie, adjusting the strap of his holster over his head and drawing his automatic from its place. "Maybe someone will hear it and unbar the door!"

"Shoot straight up, Jimmie!" cautioned Ned.

"All right, Boss!" replied the lad, pointing the weapon toward the thatch and pressing the trigger. "Look at that fire up there!" he added, directing the attention of his chums toward the roof.

"The thatch is burning through!" gasped Harry excitedly.

"It won't be long before the roof falls!" added Jack.

Jimmie pressed the trigger again and again in the hope that the sound of his shots would reach friendly ears and procure their release.

Fire now began dropping from several places in the thatch, while the barn filled with smoke. The crackling of the flames grew louder as the fire spread. All the boys were coughing and choking from the smoke they were compelled to inhale. They grouped near the door.

"Here comes the fireman!" yelled Jimmie in delight, as the others were preparing again to attempt an onslaught on the post that had resisted their previous efforts. "Go, slow, lads! One at a time!"

His shout had been called forth by a rattle at the barred door. Springing quickly toward the entrance he called out:

"Hurry up, there! Pull that bar off the door! We're choking!"

A few words unintelligible to Jimmie came in reply.

Directly the bar was removed and the door opened, letting in a great rush of fresh air. As if urged to greater effort in its mad attempt to destroy the boys, the fire blazed up with redoubled fury. The entire roof burst out in flame, no doubt augmented by the sudden rush of air through the now wide opened doorway. The barn was doomed.

Bursting through the entrance, the boys nearly ran over an old man trembling with excitement. His peculiar costume excited their curiosity at once. Dressed in a loose fitting jacket that fell outside baggy trousers, his bare feet thrust into wooden shoes, and with his long white hair falling down over his shoulders, he presented a sight the boys long remembered. He was talking excitedly in French.

"Well, Rip Van Winkle," offered Jimmie, after his first full breath of pure air, "we're much obliged to you, I'm sure. Come away from there, now," he added, "the roof will fall presently!"

But in spite of Jimmie's urging the old man tried to enter the stable again, all the time mumbling to himself.

"What is he saying?" inquired Ned, detaining the old man.

"Listen!" commanded Jimmie. Then addressing their rescuer:

"What did you say? What do you want in there?" he shouted.

"Jimmie, Jimmie!" cautioned Ned. "Maybe he isn't deaf!"

"Sure enough!" agreed Jimmie, in a self-

condemnatory tone, "I forgot, and tried to shout at him because he doesn't understand English!"

"What is he saying?" again asked Ned, drawing nearer.

"La vasche, la vasche!" repeated their friend.

"Oh, it's the boss you want?" triumphantly responded Jimmie. Then, indicating Ned, he said: "This is our boss; ask him!"

But the old man shook his head and tried again to enter the barn.

"I'll bet I know what he wants!" cried Jack. "He thinks his cow is in the barn, and he's looking for it! Here, Mister, is this it?" Jack emitted a long and very dignified "Moo-oo-oo!"

A smile overspread the aged features as the man nodded vigorously.

Ned glanced at Jimmie with a twinkle in his eye. Catching Ned's glance, the lad turned away with a very red face and mumbled:

"She ain't here! She went down to the delicatessen about half an hour ago to get a pint of milk. You needn't wait!"

"That's a good one, Jimmie!" Ned laughed. "He didn't want me!"

"That's a horse on me, all right!" admitted Jimmie sheepishly.

Taking the old gentleman by the arm, Ned led him carefully away from the burning building. He pointed back and shook his head as if to indicate that nothing remained inside the building. In a short time the roof fell with a crash. Silently weeping, the old man sat watching the destruction of his stack of fodder and barn.

"Well, where is The Rat?" asked Jimmie, recalling the boys to the present. "If I could get hold of him, I'd warm his jacket! "

"Don't know, I'm sure!" replied Ned. "Maybe he went away in the other airship that arrived just as the fire started!"

Jimmie gave a gasp. Turning to Ned in astonishment, he said:

"Ned, you don't suppose that the officer returned and then they burned the place and left us there to die! I don't believe it!' '

"Say," put in Jack, "if it wasn't so hard to believe, that would be the most reasonable solution of the whole matter!"

"Wonder what they did to the Grey Eagle before they left!" suggested Harry. "Sup-

pose we take a stroll over there and look about."

"I can see the machine there in the field where we left it," spoke up Jimmie. "Suppose we ask the old party here for some supper!"

"Hungry again, Jimmie?" laughed Ned.

"Sure I am, and so are you, if you'd admit it!" returned the boy. "Let's get something to eat and ask the old fellow if he noticed which way the airship went as it left here. He must have seen it!"

"All right, go ahead and ask him!" grinned Ned.

"Aw, shucks!" sputtered Jimmie. "You know I can't talk French!"

"Go on, Jimmie, say 'Polly Voo' to him, anyway!" laughed Jack

"Polly Voo, yourself, if you want to!" answered Jimmie, somewhat sulkily. "I've made a fool of myself once, and that's enough! Besides," he added, "I want to wash this blood and dirt off my ear!"

"That's right, Jimmie, we nearly forgot you!" said Ned. "We ought to be scolded for neglecting you after your brave effort!"

Approaching the old man, who still be-

moaned the loss of his property, Ned indicated by signs that they wanted water to bathe the injured boy's bleeding ear. Comprehending at once, the man fetched a basin of water and set it down before them.

"Now, when it comes to the supper, I'll ask him for it myself!" declared Jimmie. "You promised while we were in New York I might do that!"

"Sure as you live!" agreed Jack. "I remember that!"

Filled with enthusiasm at the prospect of his venture in sign language, Jimmie tapped the man's shoulder and then pointed to his own mouth. Describing a circle with his hands, he indicated a plate heaped high, and then patted his stomach. His efforts were effective.

Instantly comprehending, the man smiled and disappeared into his cottage, to return at once with a bowl of stew and loaf of black bread.

Under the attack of four hungry boys the bread and soup were soon dispatched, and Ned pressed upon their host a piece of money.

"Let's be on our way now," suggested Harry. "I don't believe we need to wait for the

officer's return. He and The Rat are probably miles away by this time. Maybe they're in Paris!"

"We'd better head for Paris, too!" advised Jimmie.

"Let's overhaul the Grey Eagle first, and see if it's all there!"

"Come on, fellows, we've paid the landlord, and I'm ready!"

Jimmie raced the short distance to the airship. Followed by his chums, the lad examined closely every part of the machine.

"Hello, what's this?" he cried in a moment. "It looks as if The Rat and the officer left us a farewell note!"

"Not The Rat!" urged Harry. "That's a Boy Scout message!"

CHAPTER X.

Boy Scouts for Targets.

"Pooh!" scorned Jimmie. "I suppose you think the old gentleman is leader of the Patrol and wrote this note to ask us to come again!"

"Maybe he's asking us to return his lost ——. What was it he was looking for and couldn't find?" asked Ned, with twinkling eyes.

"He said he wanted his 'Vosh'!" was Jimmie's brazen reply, for he had now quite recovered from his embarrassment. "I've got a French word that I won't forget in a hurry! Oh, I'm learning!"

"Let's examine that message a little more closely," requested Ned, from his position on the ground beside the machine. "It surely looks like Boy Scout work, but was evidently prepared in a hurry."

"It looks like a leaf from a memorandum book!"

"I believe that's what it is! Where did you find it, Jimmie?"

"Right here, under the spark lever. It was

jammed beneath the click. I was just going to throw it away when I saw the marks on it!"

"Look at the signature!" spoke up Harry, peering over Ned's shoulder. "That's English, anyway! Can you read it, Ned?"

"Yes, it says 'Jean Voisin,' just as plain as can be!"

"That isn't English!" put in Jack. "That's French!"

"What Patrol does he belong to?" asked Jimmie. "Look for his mark. If he's a friend of ours he'll put that in, too."

"Here's a picture of a Hawk's head. Maybe that's his Patrol. And then here are some other marks that indicate his rank, no doubt!"

"He makes a pretty good picture of 'Signs in Stones!'" was Jack's comment. "Three stones piled one on top of another. That's a neat picture. Why," with a startled glance around, "that's 'Danger!'"

"Correct! Go to the head of the class!" decided Jimmie.

"I vote we get going somewhere!" put in Harry, moving around the end of the planes. "Hello!" he added, stumbling over an object

on the ground. "Guess my eyesight is poor! I didn't see those stones!"

"Take another look!" advised Jimmie. "Weren't they piled on top of each other? I thought I saw the pile just as you kicked it!"

"Guess they were," admitted Harry. "Who did that, I wonder?"

"Maybe The Hawk did it," Jimmie suggested from his perch in the aeroplane. "It would be just like him to add that to the note."

"Hello!" cried Ned, as he examined the ground near Harry's position. "There's another little pile of three stones!"

"I see them!" shouted Harry, pointing out their position. "And here's another one lying beside the pile. That means 'Danger in this direction,' according to my understanding. What do you think it means?"

"Wait a minute!" cried Jimmie. "Ned, in what direction is Paris from our present location?"

"Roughly speaking, southeast," answered Ned.

"Then I'll bet that's a warning for us not to go to Paris!" Jimmie exultantly went on. "The compass shows that the two piles of

stones lie almost directly southeast from the Grey Eagle! That's it!"

"I wonder if The Rat knows Boy Scout signs and put those things there to head us off from following him! It is a sure thing that he was headed for Paris when he left here!" decided Jack.

"Guess you're right, Jack," Ned agreed. "But why should he sign himself 'Jean Voisin'? I can't understand that!"

"What does 'Voisin' mean, Jimmie, asked Jack, laughing.

"Search me!" replied the lad. "I'm not up on French!"

"I think it means 'Neighbor'," Ned answered thoughtfully. "Wasn't that the meaning given in the article we were reading about airships where it told that 'Taube', the German name, means 'Pigeon' and that 'Voisin' means 'Neighbor?' I believe that's it!"

"Rather sarcastic, I should say!" ventured Harry. "It wasn't a very neighborly act to shut us up in that barn and then burn it down, while he flew away! He added insult to injury when he left this note! How did he expect us to find the note if we were burned in the barn?"

"That was rather a nervy piece of business!" scornfully decided Jimmie. "I vote we use the brass knuckles on him!"

"It's too bad you didn't live a hundred years or so ago, Jimmie!" Ned laughed. "If we didn't know you so well, we'd be thinking all the time that you were a pirate and itching for a fight!"

"I'm not much of a scrapper," Jimmie stated, "but if we ever meet, you will have a chance to practice 'First Aid' on The Rat!"

Laughingly the boys received this statement, for they all knew well Jimmie's tendency to exaggerate, yet they all felt that he had ample grounds for feeling aggrieved at the one called "The Rat."

It was decided that their recent captor and his companion had departed for Paris and that, as nothing could be gained by returning to Havre at this time, their best course would be to go to Paris also.

No time was lost in preparing for flight. Waving a farewell to the friendly old man who had saved their lives, the boys seated themselves in the Grey Eagle and were soon under way.

Dusk was falling as they rose above the row

of trees at the roadside, and as Jimmie turned on the switch controlling the lights illuminating the instruments under the pilot's cowl, he asked:

"Shall we put on the searchlight, Ned?"

"No, I don't think we'd better have that going," Ned decided. "Some of the country people hereabouts might become alarmed and send word to the War Department that a German invasion is taking place!"

"Good idea!" assented Jimmie. "But do you know how to steer?"

"Yes. Southeasterly is the general course. I'll make it a little southeast by east about a quarter south, for we flew some distance to the southward of Havre in crossing the river before we were overhauled."

"We ought to see the lights of Paris when we get up higher, anyway," Jimmie suggested. "How big a place is Paris? How far is it?"

"It is a little bigger than Peapack, N. J.," replied Jack, "and is just about a hundred miles from Havre, unless they have moved it since the last maps were made. I don't think they've moved it, though!"

"Would they move it if the Germans took

declared Jimmie emphatically. "It doesn't seem right! I think it is cruel!"

"Imagine a nation represented by one man," suggested Harry. "Take your own case. Didn't you go out and declare war on Pete and his gang on Long Island? And see what chance The Rat has if you ever get him!"

"Well, that wasn't so very different, come to think of it," admitted Jimmie. "But I had a perfectly good reason!"

"That's what these nations think!" declared Harry. "They don't stop to think of the individual soldiers any more than you stopped to think of your lips and fists. The ones to suffer are the fellows like that trainload of wounded boys bound for Paris!"

"You win the argument!" admitted Jimmie. "But that makes me think——. If they're bound for Paris, why not follow their trail, and we'll get there, too. That's Boy Scout trailing for you!"

"All right, we'll follow," replied Ned, turning on power. "Only we're not going to poke along like that train!"

At Ned's touch the Grey Eagle responded with an increase of speed that soon left the train far behind. Jimmie sighed as it disap-

peared from view. Jack noticed the sigh and comfortingly said:

"You should worry about that stuff, Jimmie. Forget it!"

"I'm worrying about what would happen to the boys of the U. S. A. if we get into a war with some other country! Maybe they couldn't lick us, but before it stopped a good many would be hurt!"

"What's that thing over there to the northward?" asked Harry, pointing in the direction indicated.

"Where?" asked Ned. "I can't see anything!"

"It looks like a tall pole or something standing straight up!"

"I see it!" cried Jack, looking through a pair of binoculars. "It looks like the pictures of the Eiffel Tower! That's what it is!"

"Let's see," requested Jimmie, reaching for the glasses.

"Yes, sir, that's what it is, I believe!" he added. "Look, Ned!"

Ned surrendered the levers to Jimmie and gazed at the object.

"I believe you're right, Jimmie!" he agreed. "We're near Paris!"

"Then we'd better decide where we want to stop," suggested Jimmie. "Have you any idea as to localities?"

"Not in the slightest," replied Ned. "I think we'd better get in touch with the War Office as quickly as possible to head off The Rat!"

"I can see the houses below us!" spoke up Harry.

"Nobody home but the clock, and that's on a strike!" put in Jimmie. "Why don't they have a few lights going down there? The town's as dark as a miser's pocket! Have they all gone visiting?"

"Probably it is an order on account of the war!" explained Jack. "They're afraid of German aeroplanes flying over and dropping bombs."

"Well, we won't drop any bombs!" asserted Jimmie.

"Yes, but they don't know it!" argued Jack. "Let's put on the searchlight and try to find a good landing place. What do you say?"

It was agreed that this would be the proper thing to do, and the boy turned the switch. He directed the shaft of light downward.

Housetops, trees, streets, were revealed in the glare from the powerful flame. By its

light the boys saw that they were only a short distance above the earth. No place for landing appeared.

"I see the river," announced Jimmie. "Don't get us wet!"

"Guess we'll have to swing around and land in one of these wide streets, Ned!" suggested Harry. "I can't make out any other vacant spot big enough for a safe landing. Is that a good idea?"

"I guess it's as good as any," replied Ned. "I'll swing around and try that broad street we just crossed!"

"Hope there's somebody home when we land!" Jimmie put in.

At that moment the boys saw below them a flash of light. A sharp report assailed their ears, and again they heard the peculiar tearing, whistling sound of a bullet in its flight through the air.

CHAPTER XI.

A Boy Scout Rescuer.

"That's getting entirely too common nowadays!" protested Jack.

"Maybe it was some nervous resident who thought we were coming to blow him out of his happy home," Jimmie responded. "It isn't often a fellow can hit anything shooting straight up like that!"

As he spoke, another flash of light and a report from the street bespoke another attempt to fire upon the Grey Eagle and its occupants. This time the bullet came nearer the mark, for it tore its way through one of the lower planes. Alarmed, the boys peered downward.

"Hurry up and get landed, Ned!" urged Jimmie. "This isn't so funny as it might be! Maybe that fellow will hit us accidentally!"

"And go around covering himself with glory ever afterward!" put in Harry. "I wish they'd pass a law against carrying concealed weapons!"

"Watch out now," commanded Ned, tersely. "I don't know what this street is like. Maybe there are telephone wires there!"

"I'll handle the searchlight!" volunteered Jimmie, seizing the controller as he spoke. "I'll give you plenty of chance to see."

Under the skillful handling of Ned the Grey Eagle came gracefully to a landing on the broad, smooth asphalted street. The boys were not even jarred by the impact as the aeroplane slid to a resting place.

Although the muffler had been deadening the sound of the engine's exhaust to a mere hum, and no clamor of the motors had, therefore, disturbed the city's inhabitants, a large crowd of boys and old men quickly gathered.

Talking volubly and excitedly in the French tongue, they clustered about the machine, addressing shouts and inquiries at the boys. Uncertain what course to pursue, the lads remained in their positions. Scarcely had the machine come to a standstill, however, before uniformed police dashed out of side streets, approaching the Grey Eagle on the run.

"Here come the cops!" cried Jimmie, catching sight of the foremost.

"Ned, I guess it's up to you to be spokesman, as usual," suggested Jack, as the crowd parted to afford the officer a nearer approach.

"Sure, he knows more French than any of us!" chuckled Jimmie.

A rapid question in French was addressed to the boys by the policeman, who had now gained the side of their machine. Ned spread his hands palm upwards and shrugged his shoulders in a deprecating gesture.

Again the officer spoke in the same language, but more vehemently this time. Apparently he was demanding an answer to his former question.

"We heard you the first time, Old Scout!" replied Jimmie. "But if it's just the same to you, we don't know what you mean! If you expect to hold conversation with us, you'll have to start talking United States!"

Instantly a murmur went round the crowd. The boys could hear various ones repeating in awed tones "Etats Unis, Etats Unis."

Noticing the murmur, Jimmie swelled out his chest and said:

"You see, lads, I made them understand me first shot! Notice how quickly they grabbed that United States stuff? I'm good, eh?"

But evidently the officer was not satisfied. Brandishing a club, he started to climb up the frame work of the Grey Eagle.

"Now take it easy, there, Buddie!" warned Jimmie. "You've got all night, so take it easy! Go slow, and it'll last longer!"

Without heeding him the policeman, evidently determined to carry out his purpose, continued to mount the structure. Jimmie was fast losing his temper at this familiarity, and quickly produced his automatic.

"Now, back up, you rough-neck!" he gritted, aiming his pistol at a spot well above the officer's head. "You are going too far!"

Evidently the tone if not the words penetrated the officer's comprehension, for he precipitately retreated to the pavement. He was rescued from complete rout only by the approach of several other officers who came running up at that moment. Jimmie took advantage of the confusion to slip the automatic back into its holster inside his jacket.

"I wonder if these fellows are not the 'Gendarmes' of Paris that we've read about?" queried Harry from his seat in the darkness.

"Possibly they are," replied Ned. "I understand they are very efficient as protectors of the public, too! They look like fine men."

"Aw, shucks!" protested Jimmie. "One of the Broadway Squad could eat a half dozen

of these fellows! They don't look like so much!"

"Just the same, let's go easy with them. We'd better not start anything that will result in our getting into trouble of any kind."

"All right, Ned," acquiesced Jimmie. "Just as you say."

"Better throw on a little light and let them see what we look like, they're coming in a bunch!" warned Jack, who had been watching.

With the snap of the switch a flood of light swept over the four boys in the Grey Eagle. It revealed to the approaching officers their visitors seated, and with their right hands raised in salute.

Instantly comprehending the situation, the one who seemed to be in command of the squad smiled at the lads and raised his own hand in return. He seemed immensely relieved when he saw the character of those who had surprised them by the nocturnal visit.

Approaching as near as possible, he spoke politely in French, addressing the group of lads. Ned shook his head and replied:

"Excuse me, officer, but we can't under-

stand you. Perhaps you understand English. That's the only language we can speak."

"Ah!" answered the officer pleasantly. "And whom have I the honor of addressing? I do not seem to recognize you!"

"We are four boys from the United States," replied Ned pleasantly, "making a trip through France for pleasure. We have been detained and are, therefore, somewhat confused as to our location in Paris. Perhaps you could direct us to a good hotel, and also to the War Office."

"Certainly, gentlemen," responded the officer, "I shall be most happy to accommodate you in any way possible. But, first, it will be necessary for me to examine your passports and to report your presence to the Prefect of Police. It is only my duty, you know!"

"If we can be sure of a guard to protect our aeroplane," Ned suggested, "we shall be glad to accompany you to the office of the Prefect. We must communicate with your War Office at the earliest moment possible. We wish to avoid international complications."

A look of astonishment and interest overspread the features of the officer. Turning to his companions, he rapidly gave orders. Two

of the Gendarmes at once began forcing back to a respectful distance the curious crowd. Ned and his companions were impressed with the respectful promptness with which the onlookers obeyed the officer's commands.

Alighting from their positions, the boys stretched their cramped legs in relief, and stood at attention ready for the next move.

"When does the next 'Jitney bus' arrive?" asked Jimmie.

"Your pardon, please," spoke up the officer, "I do not understand the term you have just used. My use of English is imperfect."

"My use of English is also imperfect," spoke up Jimmie, confusedly, "and I am the one to apologize. That term is United States slang for a public motor bus. Ned, here, says I use too much slang!"

"I comprehend," laughed the officer, "and you are not at all at fault. I regret to say, however, that since the war began no busses are run in the streets of Paris. We shall be compelled to walk."

Leaving the Grey Eagle in charge of the two men detailed to protect their precious property, the boys set off at a brisk walk in company with their new-found friend, and

were soon standing before the desk in a police station. A white-haired sergeant confronted them.

A glance at the kindly expression in his eyes told the boys that they would not fare illy at his hands. Ned determined to confide fully in the officer and to tell him the object of their visit.

Immediately upon arriving the officer who had accompanied them conferred with his superior in a low tone, using the French tongue. Watching closely, the boys were convinced that his report was not unfavorable.

At length the elderly sergeant made an entry in a book, and then addressed the boys. His manner was dignified, yet conciliatory.

"Very much to my regret, gentlemen, I have to inform you that, although your passports and identification seem to be perfectly proper, there is lodged with the police department a complaint that you are here seeking information that would be put to improper use."

"In other words," Ned put in, as the sergeant paused, "we are suspected, and perhaps accused, of being here as spies!"

"I don't like to use just that term," returned

the sergeant, and then added: "But, after all, a name matters very little."

"Your informant," spoke up Jimmie, "is probably well known to us. We have had dealings with him before this. You may not believe it, but we know him to be not only a thorough rascal, but a traitor as well!"

This statement was received by the sergeant with considerable astonishment. His glance at Jimmie was plainly a question.

Briefly the boys gave a synopsis of the events already known, not forgetting to mention the dangerous situation in which their enemy had succeeded in placing them only a short time previous to the present.

Not a word of the story was lost by either the officer or the sergeant, who occasionally exchanged quick glances full of meaning.

"You surely have occasion to suspect this person whom you call 'The Rat,' and I am sure your efforts will be crowned with success," the sergeant offered, at the conclusion of the story. "However, my orders are to detain you if found, and present you at the War Office. You will, of course, appreciate my position and understand what 'duty' means."

"Yes, sir," Ned returned, "we believe we

know what 'duty' means, and we surely cannot object to your doing yours, but we would like very much to know where this man we referred to is located at the present."

A smile overspread the face of the sergeant.

"He is under surveillance. He cannot get far away until permitted to do so by agents of the War Office. Although his credentials appeared to be fully as valid as your own, we cannot afford to take risks at such a time as now. He will be produced in good season."

"Thank you!" Ned replied heartily. "I feel easier now, and hope our mission is nearly accomplished. If we can once obtain extradition papers and return the fellow to the United States we shall be pleased."

"When can we visit the War Office, and lay our case before the proper officials?" asked Harry eagerly. "We don't want to lose any time!"

"Perhaps not before morning," was the answer. "It is late now."

"Isn't it possible to get someone on the telephone?" suggested Jack, indicating the instrument at the sergeant's elbow as he spoke.

"That would be rather irregular, unless the case were very urgent!"

"This case seems to me to be extremely urgent," persisted Jack.

"Perhaps you are right," thoughtfully acknowledged the other. "I shall assume responsibility and make the effort at any rate."

Accordingly, he asked for a number, and in a short time was conversing in French with someone who appeared to be his superior. He soon replaced the instrument and turned again to address the boys.

"An interview has been arranged for morning," he announced. "In the interim we will provide you the best accommodations at our command."

"Does that mean that we bunk in the cooler?" indignantly protested Jimmie, pushing forward. "I protest, your Honor! It isn't fair!"

"There is no other way!" declared the sergeant kindly.

"But let us go to a hotel!" argued Jimmie. "We can pay our way!"

Shaking his head, the sergeant gave directions for their disposal, and indicated that the interview was at an end by rising from his chair.

Jimmie was not easily mollified, however,

and began a vigorous protest, which was with difficulty silenced by his chums. He declared that he felt highly insulted at being placed in a cell in a police station.

"Hello, look who's here!" cried Jack, in the midst of the argument.

A young lad of about their own age had entered. He was dressed in a khaki uniform which seemed to be a modification of their own.

As the four boys gazed at the newcomer his hand rose in the well-known Boy Scout salute. This was immediately answered.

CHAPTER XII.

At the War Office.

For only a moment the newcomer stood at attention, then quickly crossing the room, he extended a hand in greeting. His frank countenance beamed with pleasure as he shook hands with each of the four boys.

Jimmie broke the silence which followed by saying:

"Well, Scout, I see by your badge that you're a Hawk!"

"Yes," slowly answered the lad. "I belong to that Patrol."

"We're Black Bears and Wolves," volunteered Jimmie. "We're all from New York. We just came over here on a little pleasure trip!"

"Oh!" returned the newcomer, in a tone of interest. "You are a long way from home. I hope you are enjoying yourselves."

"We don't like the hotels here very well," returned Jimmie. "The sergeant here is going to give us a nice room in the 'Hotel de Flop!' "

"I don't understand," puzzled the boy, "where is the 'Hotel de Flop?' "

"Right here in the cooler!" explained Jimmie. Then noticing that he had not simplified matters, he continued: "The gentleman at the desk is going to put us in the 'pen' for the night. In the 'dungeon'!"

"Now I understand!" laughed the other. "That would be disagreeable," he went on. "Perhaps we can arrange it some other way!"

"Well, if you've got a 'pull' with His Honor," Jimmie stated, "we'd appreciate it highly, I can tell you! We don't like the outlook!"

"Perhaps the better way to begin would be by introductions," suggested the lad. "My name is Francois Poincaire. I reside in Paris."

"Glad to meet you, I'm sure!" declared Jimmie, again extending his hand. "My name's Jimmie McGraw, of New York." Then, indicating his companions, he named them in turn. "Now I guess we're acquainted."

"Thank you," acknowledged Francois. "Just let me make a note of the names. I can remember them better if I write them down."

With this he drew from a pocket a memorandum book and pencil. As he was searching for a blank page, Jimmie nudged Ned.

Drawing down one eyelid the lad took from a pocket the note that had been found on the Grey Eagle. Carefully unfolding the paper, Jimmie compared it with the pages of the memorandum book in which Francois was inscribing their names.

Nodding his head the lad rapidly conversed with Ned in the mute language used to great advantage by the boys at various times.

"It looks like the same kind of paper!" he signaled.

"That looks rather strange!" returned Ned in the same manner.

"Maybe he's in league with The Rat!" Jimmie ventured. Then as Francois looked up with a pleasant smile from his task, the lad said:

"Well, Mr. Neighbor, we got your message all right, but we couldn't see our way clear to stay away from Paris!"

A puzzled look came over the face of Francois. He shook his head.

"May I take a look at your handwriting?" requested Jimmie, reaching out a hand for the meromandum book which was handed to him.

Quickly running over the leaves Jimmie

soon found wnat he sought. Drawing from his pocket the message he fitted it to the stub of a torn page. Flushing with hardly suppressed excitement, he turned to Francois:

"So that's the kind of a Boy Scout you are, eh? In league with The Rat, are you? Well, all I've got to say is that you're in mighty poor business! It's a funny thing you should happen to leave this note and then happen to drop in here just at this time! Can you explain it?"

Jimmie's disgust was apparent to all. His rather uncertain temper was rapidly getting the better of him as he considered what seemed to be evidence of the guilt of their newly made acquaintance.

Touching Jimmie on the arm as a warning of caution, Ned said:

"Your handwriting is remarkably like the signature of this message. Perhaps you may be able to tell us something about it."

"Yes," laughed Francois with ease. "I didn't have time to do more than leave that message and the 'signs in stones.' In fact, I had barely time to do that! I felt sure you would understand!"

"We interpreted the message correctly, I

believe," answered Ned, "but we attributed the authorship to another person. You were a stranger to us when we found the message and we believed it was written by another."

"I see now the mistake I made," ventured Francois soberly. "If I had it to do over again I should take a different course. But my time was limited and I did the best I could under the circumstances."

"Did you pile up those stones?" asked Jimmie, still ruffled.

"Yes," was the frank admission. "I tried my best to warn you not to come to Paris. I knew the dangers in store for you!"

"Maybe you didn't know the dangers we were in at that time!"

"No, I didn't. After we had gotten some distance away, I looked back and saw smoke rising from the barn. Did it burn?"

"If it didn't burn, I don't know what to call it!" declared Jimmie indignantly. "Who set it afire, anyhow? Do you know anything about that?"

"No, but I suspect a person. I am very sorry that I did not remain to assist you, for I understand now that you were in peril. At

that time I believed you were in danger only from the person to whom I refer."

"Why did you sign the note Jean Voisin?" asked Jimmie.

"I thought you, being aviators, would recall the word and would know what it meant. Jean, of course, was simply added to make a complete name. I did not think that you do not understand French."

"You're progressing!" declared Jimmie. "Now, if you'll tell us how you happened to be on the spot, we'll be much obliged to you!"

"I am interested in aviation and hope soon to be able to qualify as an army aviator," answered Francois. "Today I was making a trial flight with a man who is conducting a school for aviators. We had proceeded to Havre early in the day and intended to return to Paris in the afternoon. While at Havre my instructor was approached by a man who offered to pay well for being carried to Paris. We did not like his looks, but money is always acceptable and it was decided to accept him as a passenger."

"Did he say why he wanted to get to Paris?" inquired Jimmie.

"No. Later in the day he came to us and

said that he would go part of the distance with another aviator who intended to race with a new aeroplane. We were to follow and be prepared to pick him up if a landing were made. He offered to pay extra for this service.

"Accordingly we noted the direction taken by your machine and the one following. We proceeded more slowly and arrived after the departure of the one which had chased you. As we landed I saw that you were being held prisoners in the barn. I had already learned that you were Boy Scouts and my instructor had told me that this man intended harm if you followed.

"Thinking only to warn you as you came from the barn after your captor had departed, I placed the hastily written message and the stones. I had barely time to regain my place when we were again in flight."

"Well," decided Jimmie, "I guess you're a good scout after all and I want to ask you to overlook my suspicion of your intentions."

"I can readily do that," smiled Francois, "if you'll agree to forgive my stupid neglect of you when you were in peril."

"Let's forget that part entirely," urged

Jimmie. "The thing to do now is to get this fellow who came to Paris with you. We want him!"

In answer to Francois' puzzled look Ned explained briefly the reason why they were seeking "The Rat" and ended with a description of their present plight. The boys all felt that Francois could be trusted.

"Wait a moment and I will see what can be done," the boy offered.

Turning to the sergeant who with the officers had been waiting at a respectful distance, he spoke rapidly in French. A brief conversation ensued, following which the sergeant again made use of the telephone.

This time Francois himself conversed with the party at the other end of the line and seemed to be urging compliance with his request. Evidently satisfied with the result of his efforts, he returned to the boys with beaming countenance. He was eminently pleased at the outcome.

"We will proceed at once," he announced, "to the War Office, where we will be met by some officials who wish to listen to your story. They consider it important enough to bring them from their homes!"

"How did you do it?" inquired Jack. "Have you influence?"

Francois only smiled in reply. He seemed anxious to start at once and was impatient at the short delay necessary in assigning an officer to accompany the lads, for they were still in the hands of the police.

After a brisk walk of short duration the lads were conducted into a great building and shown to a suite of handsomely appointed rooms. Here, seated at a large table, were several distinguished looking men.

As the lads entered, accompanied by the police officer, they paused a moment. All eyes were turned in their direction.

At a silent signal from Ned all stood at attention and gave the Boy Scout salute. A faint smile showed for an instant on the faces of those about the table. Returning the salutation with a military salute, they acknowledged the boys' greeting. Seats were indicated for all.

"Since it is understood that you young men do not understand French," began a gentleman at the head of the table, "it has been decided that we will carry on these proceedings in the English tongue."

"Thank you!" Ned spoke up. "We regret very much the fact that we cannot understand your language. We hope you will not be inconvenienced."

"Scarcely," smiled the gentleman. "English is familiar to all assembled here, even to the stenographer who will make notes of what is said."

"Gee!" whispered Jimmie, somewhat awed by the surroundings and the men before him. "This is going to be a regular court!"

"Looks like it," answered Jack, who sat near by. "We're all right, though. Those men look very friendly and we are on the side of right!"

Once more Ned was required to detail their experiences and the causes that led up to their trip to Paris in quest of the man whom they believed to be an enemy of their country. His statements were listened to with interest by all. As he spoke of the desire of himself and comrades to prevent the United States becoming involved in trouble with another nation, quick glances were exchanged. The lad's earnest manner was evidently making a favorable impression upon his hearers.

"And so," concluded Ned in his recital, "we

feel that we are asking a great deal if we request you not to buy those plans which he is alleged to have stolen, but for the sake of international peace we do it."

"My lad," spoke up one of the men, "have you considered what we might do with the plans you mention should they come into our hands?"

"Of course," Ned replied, "we boys all understand that the most friendly relations exist between your country and ours and we cannot believe that you would purchase the plans from the alleged thief for any purpose. They might be valuable, however, to a country at war with the United States."

"But think for a moment that France was on the Isthmus of Panama long before your country took over the work of building the canal. Is it not probable that we already have topographical maps from which we could determine very accurately just where defenses of the canal might be placed?"

"That's true enough," admitted Ned.

"Even were we disposed to make war upon your country," continued the gentleman, "such plans would not be necessary to our ends. It seems to us scarcely necessary to

secure information in such an undesirable way as the one which the man of whom you speak is about to offer us."

"I'm glad to hear you say that!" Ned responded in a tone of relief. "Now, if we could get this fellow and start him back, we'd feel better."

"We will hear what he may have to say," announced the man.

Turning in his chair he indicated to an officer standing near that he might bring in a visitor. In a moment "The Rat" entered the room.

"We understand that you wished to interview us," began the man who had questioned Ned. "Will you kindly state the purpose of your visit?"

A quick glance about the room seemed to satisfy the visitor that he might expect little success from any attempt to dispose of his wares in that market. Guessing full well that the boys had been given an opportunity to tell their story, he said with a short laugh:

"I have an important communication to make, but I think it can wait. I will return in the morning when there are no Germans present!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Left to Starve.

Wheeling in his tracks, The Rat sprang for the door. In his path stood the officer who had conducted him into the apartment. Surprised at the sudden movement, this worthy made no effort to stop the departing guest, but remained motionless in his position.

Throwing out an arm in the familiar movement employed by football players when warding off an opponent, "The Rat" landed his fist squarely on the solar plexus of the officer. Emitting a coughing grunt, that individual was bowled over in a most undignified manner.

Ere he could regain his feet and his dignity, "The Rat" had dashed madly out of the room, through the corridor and made good his escape.

"Walked right in and turned around——" quoted Jimmie, with a grin at the officer's evident discomfiture.

"He didn't leave his card, either," smiled Harry. "Wonder where he's going in such a

hurry," he added. "He is surely up to something!"

"Probably he will head for Berlin now that he sees there is no market where he can dispose of his goods in this town," ventured Jack.

Thrown into surprised confusion by the unusual and undignified interruption of their deliberations, the gentlemen who had received the boys were apparently unable to give coherent thought to the matter in hand. They were recalled to a consideration of the case by Ned.

"Cannot we put out a dragnet and have this fellow arrested?" he inquired presently. "If you can detain him on some charge, we will at once cable for the necessary papers to secure his exchange to our country. He is far too dangerous a man to allow at large."

"Thank you for the suggestion," exclaimed one of the gentlemen. "It is a good one and we will act upon it at once."

"Rest assured," spoke up another, "the police will at once take the man into custody and the matter will be arranged as you wish."

Considering the matter closed and with repeated assurances of friendship for the boys

and the country they represented, the gentlemen wished them a hearty good-night after telephoning instructions to the police department regarding the arrest of "The Rat."

Francois volunteered to accompany the boys to a suitable hotel, where accommodations could be secured, and in his company they left the War Office. Owing to the scarcity of cabs and other street conveyances due to the presence at the front of all available men, the boys were compelled to walk to their proposed lodging some distance away.

"There's something the matter with me," Jimmie announced as the lads were once more upon the street. "I have a funny feeling!"

"Possibly you are upset by the different drinking water," Ned suggested anxiously. "I hope you are not going to be ill!"

"Are you feverish, Jimmie?" inquired Jack. "You look all right!"

"No," responded the lad with a twinkle in his eye, "I think I have a cold. You remember the old saying: 'Feed a cold and starve a fever!' I'm quite sure I have a bad cold and want to take treatment!"

"Again?" queried Harry, laughing. "Jimmie, you've got a chronic case of semi-star-

vation. I believe you could eat in your sleep!"

"You're right, Harry," agreed Jimmie. "I'm a healthy young chap and besides I do the thinking for the whole party. It takes considerable nourishment to keep my thinking machine in working order."

"In that case," laughingly responded Ned, "we may as well go along with you to a restaurant and see that you don't overdo the matter. You might diagnose your case as pneumonia instead of a simple cold!"

"Where can we find a place open at this time, Francois?" asked Jack, who was walking beside their newly found friend.

"There are none in this section," replied Francois. "We may find some still open in another quarter, although the locality is not of the best. I will show you the way if you like."

"Lead on, Scout," urged Jimmie. "We'll follow you!"

Francois conducted the lads to a section of the city where every indication betokened it to be of the less desirable class. The houses were old and the streets were not well kept. There were few people abroad at that hour

and these were evidently men who followed no regular employment, but gained a precarious living from odd jobs.

Noting the character of the passersby and the section of the city, the lads commented rather unfavorably in that regard. Their distrust was not lessened when they observed the character of the restaurant which they finally entered. Francois apologized for the place, but stated that it was the best available at that late hour. It was too late to go elsewhere.

"Poulet au champignons!" cried Jimmie, glancing over the greasy menu. "Is that chicken with champagne or champagne with chicken?"

"It is fowl with a mushroom sauce," explained Francois.

"All right, send in five orders of that!" assented Jimmie.

"What shall we others eat?" Jack inquired, teasingly.

"That order was for the whole bunch!" declared Jimmie, indignantly. "You don't suppose I'm going to eat five hens, do you?" he added.

A waiter in a soiled apron presently ap-

peared and received their orders with an injured air. Evidently he did not relish being roused from his inactivity. Scarcely had his shuffling feet carried him kitchenwards before a man entered the place and engaged in conversation with the cashier. Jack, keenly alert because of their surroundings, noticed that the newcomer seemed to be indicating in a guarded way the lads seated at the table.

"I'll bet," he whispered to his companions, "that we get 'held up' when we leave this place. That fellow looks suspicious to me!"

The boys stole surreptitious glances at the man indicated and all agreed with Jack that he was evidently a low character planning to attack them as they left the place. They were confident, however, that nothing in the way of robbery would be attempted in the restaurant.

Contrary to their expectations they found the quality of the food much better than the appearance of the establishment would indicate and were grateful to Jimmie and Francois for their good offices.

As they were settling with the cashier, Jimmie glanced from the window and espied the suspected man standing outside, evidently

waiting for them to appear upon the street. He had drawn back into the shadow.

For perhaps a block the boys walked together in a close group discussing the possibility of an attack and the best means to ward it off should it be made. Their attention was attracted by a low whistle. An answering signal at once came from across the street.

At that moment an automobile dashed up from the rear. As it drew up to the curb near the boys two men sprang out. Other forms were seen approaching on the run. The boys were surprised by the suddenness of this movement and were hardly prepared to resist so strong a force.

In the darkness of the street they could not measure the number of their opponents. They tried to keep close together, hoping thereby to better withstand the anticipated attack. Ned struck out bravely, landing a straight arm punch on the jaw of a man who appeared directly before him.

Apparently robbery was not the object of the assault. No attempt was made to disable the lads or rifle their pockets. They were seized in rough arms, while dexterous hands wound cloths about their faces effect-

ually preventing an outcry. Their arms were securely pinioned. At a low spoken command the men lifted the now helpless boys into the waiting motor, which at once dashed madly along the poorly paved street.

Struggle as they might, the lads were unable to release themselves from their bonds. Not a word was spoken by their captors during the wild ride. At length the prisoners gave over their useless efforts.

Directly the machine was turned into a smoother street, but the speed was in no wise diminished. At length a halt was made. Dragged from their places like so many sacks of grain, the captives felt themselves hoisted to the shoulders of their abductors. Judging from sounds that they were being taken into a building of some sort, all awaited with considerable anxiety some indication of the next development.

This was not long in coming. A passageway was negotiated followed by a journey down a flight of creaking stairs. The boys were presently deposited in not too gentle a manner upon a hard floor. Footsteps retreating up the creaking stairway indicated that they were to be left alone. Nothing had been

said that would indicate the identity of their captors.

Jimmie's impatient and frantic efforts to free himself from the bonds and gag were interrupted by a voice full of venom.

"Might as well save your wind, young fellow!" the lads heard a familiar voice say. "You'll need it all before you get out of this!"

Then, since answer was evidently impossible, the voice went on:

"You fellows are so good at getting out of tight places, let's see you get out of this! You cooled the hot box, saved your hangar from burning, slipped away from Havre and got out of the barn in the country, but you did it only because you had help or wheedled some one into your way of thinking. This is different. You get no help here!

"You are in the cellar of an old warehouse that has been abandoned because the structure burned. On one side is the river Seine; on the other is a street blocked by debris from the ruined warehouse. No one ever visits this locality, so you'll have lots of time to think it over. Next time, don't try to interfere with my plans! Do you understand?"

In despair the boys lay helpless and listened

to their informant as he closed a heavy door. This was barred on the outside and heavy materials were thrown against it. Then silence reigned.

For a long time the lads lay listening for sounds that would indicate the presence of others. A muffled splash of water now and again was the only indication of movement that reached their ears.

Presently a movement showed that one of the boys was shifting his position. A sudden gasp followed by a violent exhalation of breath showed that a struggle was taking place. A tearing of cloth was heard.

"Whoo!" gasped Jimmie. "That was a tough job!"

"Any of you fellows got loose yet?" the lad continued.

For obvious reasons no answer greeted his question.

"Oh, I forgot!" cried the lad. "Maybe you're all fixed like I was. Where are you?" he continued, taking a stumbling step. "Why don't you talk?"

Quickly Jimmie produced a searchlight from an inner pocket.

It was the work of but a few moments to

find and release his fellow prisoners. A great stretching of arms and indrawing of breath followed this act. All were loud in their expressions of gratitude to Jimmie and wondered at his ability to break loose from the bonds.

"I guess they didn't take the trouble to tie me very tight," explained Jimmie modestly, but the abrasions on his bleeding wrists spoke eloquently of the heroic struggle the lad had made.

"We'll fix you up as soon as we get to a drug store!" asserted Jack. "Those cuts must hurt pretty badly. Jimmie, you're a brick!"

"Aw, shucks!" deprecated Jimmie. "Let's get out of here!"

"Here's a window with some bars over it," announced Harry, who had been examining their prison. "Maybe we could crawl out of that!"

"Yes, and drop into the river!" scorned Jimmie, approaching.

"Perhaps there might be a police boat on the river," suggested Francois. "If we could attract their attention they would help us."

"Good idea!" Jimmie approved. "I'll turn in a 'four-eleven.' "

Drawing his automatic, the boy sent two shots into the rapidly rushing stream which lapped the sides of the building. He followed these with two more and again two and again two, emptying the pistol. As he was reloading, Francois, who had been peering across the river, cried:

"They've heard you! They are coming! I see the police boat!"

Losing little time in explanations, the police loaded the five boys into their boat, bringing the gunwales nearly to the water's edge. A rattle of revolver shots greeted the tiny craft as it pulled out of the shadow of the ruined warehouse. A man dimly outlined stood above them sending shot after shot in their direction, but with poor aim.

Highly incensed, Jimmie swung his automatic around and fired.

Instantly a scream echoed through the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Gray Eagle Damaged.

At once the police officer at the oars hesitated. A parley was held in which it was decided to continue on their course to the station where the boys would be left and a report made.

Accordingly the man again bent to his oars, bringing the boat in a short time to its landing place. The boys were immediately presented before a sergeant, who took their story in detail, making suitable entries in a book before him. Francois acted as interpreter.

Only a glance at the badly soiled condition of the boys' uniforms was necessary to convince the police of the veracity of their story.

Before the lads had succeeded in making themselves presentable, an officer who had been detailed for the purpose returned and reported that although he had thoroughly searched the spot, no injured man could be discovered. It was, therefore, decided that if Jimmie's parting shot had found lodgment,

his target had been carried away by confederates.

"What shall we do now?" questioned Harry, as the boys again entered the office with brushed uniforms and washed faces.

"Go to a hotel and get some sleep!" suggested Jack. "We've had about enough excitement for one night according to my notion!"

"Object, Your Honor!" put in Jimmie. "Suggestion of counsel is immaterial and irrelevant! We ought to get back to the Gray Eagle!"

"Why so?" inquired Harry. "The police left a guard there!"

"Suppose they did!" persisted Jimmie. "Is that a guarantee that the machine is safe? I'm going back, anyhow! You can sleep!"

"Can't we telephone out there and learn if everything is all right?" put in Jack. "The officers would be glad to report."

"How would you get them on the 'phone?" scorned Jimmie. "Did you see any linemen stringing wires to the middle of the street?"

Jack was compelled to admit that his suggestion was impractical.

"Well, then," Jimmie went on, "since the

officer here is satisfied that our passports and story are all right, we'd better be on our way."

Hastily parting from their friends at the police station to whom they owed their recent rescue from an awkward situation, the five boys at once set out to visit their beloved aeroplane. Jimmie stormed freely against the man whom they were pursuing, declaring that he would be delighted to use brass knuckles if ever the opportunity offered.

His companions made no objections to his speech, for they knew it was only his way of relieving his pent-up feelings.

During the long walk the boys discussed the situation at some length. Jimmie held that "The Rat" would be well on his way toward Berlin if he could secure transportation, while Jack and Harry contended that he would not be satisfied to leave Paris until he was assured that the boys were well out of his way. They thought it likely that he would remain and make another effort to work them harm, since his previous attempts had thus far resulted in failure. They feared his vindictiveness.

"Aw, shucks!" protested Jimmie. "He prob-

ably beat it right out of town as quick as he blocked that door to the cellar!"

"You're forgetting the man who shot at us while we were in the police boat," Jack suggested. "What was he doing there? Who was he?"

"He was probably a guard that 'The Rat' had posted to make sure we didn't break jail and get the door open," Jimmie replied.

"It was rather peculiar that the police didn't find any trace of him!" interposed Ned. "I felt sure when I heard that scream that he was hit pretty hard by Jimmie's bullet. He certainly yelled some!"

"Maybe he was just scratched on the leg or something," replied Jimmie. "And again, maybe he wasn't hit at all, but let that wail out to get us to come back so he could get a better aim at us!"

"You never can tell," decided Jack. "Any one that would get mixed up in a gang like that would be pretty full of tricks!"

"Maybe he went into the river," put in Francois.

"Nix on the drink!" quickly vetoed Jimmie. "There wasn't any splash! If he'd gone overboard he'd have made one grand disturbance!"

"Not if he was shot and killed instantly," argued Francois.

"How could he be killed instantly if he let a holler out of him as big as the Singer building?" questioned Jimmie, indignantly. "No, sir," the boy continued, "you'll find that the fellow was a natural born coward and was more scared than hurt. I don't think I came anywhere near him! He's telling the gang right now what a brave man he is!"

"Have it your own way, Jimmie," decided Ned. "We are more interested in the movements of 'The Rat,' anyway. The question is: Where has he gone and how can we get him? That's the thing to decide!"

"Believe me," insisted Jimmie, "the next chapter of 'The Rat's' life history will be entitled 'Beating it for Berlin' and it'll start in sudden and go mighty swift! He's probably going as fast as that fellow Gilroy went away from the Devil's Punch Bowl in California!"

His chums laughed as they recalled the incident. For the benefit of Francois they described the amusing incident with which those who have read the previous volumes of this series are already familiar.

Directly the boys were delighted to observe

the outlines of the Gray Eagle looming up before them in the street.

Their approach was halted by a challenge from one of the guards.

Upon discovering their identity, thanks to the good offices of Francois as interpeter, the policeman allowed them to proceed.

"The crowd has disappeared, I see," Ned said to the guard.

"Yes, they soon satisfied their curiosity and returned to their homes," as the reply. "After all, an aeroplane is no longer wonderful."

"Then you haven't been bothered since we left?" ventured Ned. "I suppose it got sort of lonely out here in the street."

"No one has been here, Monsieur, except the servants you sent."

"The servants we sent?" questioned Ned wonderingly. "We sent no one! I don't quite understand you. What do you mean?"

"Your servant," insisted the man. "The man you sent to get the papers from your strong box. He has left the place but a few minutes."

Ned turned a puzzled look to his chums now grouped about.

"What sort of appearing chap was he?" inquired Jimmie, advancing.

Quickly the man began a description which the boys at once recognized as belonging to but one person of their acquaintance.

"The Rat!" gasped Jimmie in bewilderment. "Why, my dream book said he was on his way to Berlin an hour ago!" the lad insisted vigorously. "Now you tell me he's been up here claiming we sent him!"

"Maybe you didn't look closely enough in your dream book, Jimmie," consoled Jack. "You evidently failed to examine the first chapter of 'Beating it for Berlin' to learn whether he was to make any stops enroute!"

"But we didn't send anybody!" insisted Jimmie, addressing the policeman with a positive manner. "We have no servants!"

"Pardon, but he had with him an order from you stating that he was to be permitted to visit your machine and return with certain papers," insisted the guard. "My companion further down the street has it now."

"Call him over here," requested Ned. "I want to see that!"

While waiting for the approach of the other guard, Francois engaged in conversation with

the one before the lads. Turning to Ned the boy explained that he was informed The Rat, in company with another man, had visited the aeroplant with the alleged order. Thinking it genuine, the guards permitted him to seek the article wanted.

Not being inclined to trespass, the guards had not accompanied the searcher, but had waited at a respectful distance until the man and his companion were ready to leave. They had believed that they were doing only what the boys wished in the matter, hoping to be of assistance.

"Here is the permit, gentlemen," offered the second guard.

Ned took the paper and examined it by the light of an electric searchlight held conveniently close by Harry. A quick exclamation brought his chums crowding about to investigate the cause.

"Look at this!" Ned cried. "If that isn't cheek!"

"It is blank paper?" queried Jack. "Let me see it."

"Well, of all the nerve!" gasped Jimmie, taking the paper from Ned's hand and examining it closely. "What do you think of that?"

"May I see?" inquired Francois, interestedly crowding forward.

"Sure," replied Jimmie. "Here he has written a 'ha, ha' message, and given it to the guard, claiming it was his pass to search our machine! I'll bet the villain has wrecked the Grey Eagle from stem to stern!"

"Let's look it over and find out," suggested Harry at once.

Producing searchlights, in compliance with Harry's thought, the boys carefully examined the outer parts of the machine. Apparently not a thing had been disturbed. The instruments were all in place, the lockers intact, and all guy and brace wires were in place. The boys felt easier.

"Maybe he put some more dynamite in the engine!" urged Jimmie.

"He didn't have time!" declared Jack.

"By the way, Jimmie," suggested Ned to the lad who was near the instruments, "why need we grope around here with only searchlights. We have lots of current, suppose you turn on the lights for us."

"Right-O!" assented Jimmie, reaching for the switch.

No illumination resulted. Again the switch was turned.

"He's cut a wire somewhere!" declared the lad. "Maybe he had a pair of pliers and just nipped off what he could reach."

"Try to start the engine, Harry," requested Ned. "Maybe he cut the wires leading to that as well as the lamp circuit. It would not surprise me to find that he had done so. It would be just like him!"

For the first time the engine failed to respond to Harry's touch on the levers. There was no current. The wires had been severed.

"Harry, you are familiar with the lay out of this little wagon," Jimmie suggested. "Suppose you overhaul the wiring and repair it."

For nearly an hour Harry, whose experience about automobiles had been very extensive, labored, with the assistance of his chums, to repair the damage done by their enemy. Nearly every electric wire in the equipment had been severed, apparently with the aid of powerful pliers.

At length the boys were rewarded by a flash of light from the lamps. This enabled the work to go ahead more quickly, and in a

comparatively short time the engine had been wired and started.

Francois now came forward with a suggestion. He had been conversing earnestly with the guard while the boys worked on the machine.

"The man tells me," he said, "that the two men were talking as they left the place. He heard them mention Lille several times, and thinks that is their destination. Perhaps it would be well to consider this."

"Hurrah for Lille!" shouted Jimmie. "Where is the place?"

"It is about 125 miles nearly due north of Paris," replied Ned.

"It may be only a trap!" objected Jack. "Better go slowly!"

"Trap nothing!" Jimmie protested. "He didn't know the guard overheard him. And, if he did, he probably didn't think he'd tell us!"

"It can do no harm to go there, anyway," argued Harry. "If we go to Berlin it won't be much out of our way. I vote we go to Lille."

All thought of sleep had been driven from the boys by their recent experiences. They

were now anxious to be in pursuit of The Rat.

Ned showed the policeman his permit from headquarters, and lost no time in preparing the Grey Eagle for flight. Soon the machine soared into the air. Jimmie waved his hand to the policemen, whose white gloves vibrated a message of good wishes until he could no longer see them.

Below them dimly lay Paris. The Seine wound through a valley now dark and uninviting. The eastern sky, however, was becoming gray.

"I hear another machine!" announced Harry presently.

The droning of a motor became apparent to all. A monoplane was rapidly approaching. The boys watched its approach with interest.

"He's going above us," announced Harry as the machine drew near."

Suddenly a rifle shot rang out in the morning stillness. A bullet ripped its way through the forward rudder, causing the Grey Eagle to veer abruptly in its flight. Another shot came from the monoplane.

CHAPTER XV.

A Battle in the Air.

Ned with difficulty brought the Grey Eagle back to a tranquil position. So unexpectedly had the rifle shot struck the forward rudder that he had been very close to losing control of the craft and pitching the entire party to earth. With a frantic effort he regained his balance.

Due to the fact that the boys had not felt speed essential to their purpose, no attempt as yet had been made to put the Grey Eagle to its best pace. The monoplane, however, seemed to be traveling at a high rate of speed, and was not long in securing a favorable position for the evident purpose of its occupants.

"If he gets above us, he'll drop a bomb!" cried Jimmie, in an angry tone. "I'll bet it's The Rat! He's been watching for us to start!"

"Put on a little more speed, Ned," urged Jack anxiously. "Let's try to prevent his getting above us, if we can. I don't like this!"

"Hang on!" cried Ned, glancing upward to-

ward their pursuer. "I'm going to try to dodge him if I can. He's clever, though!"

Obedient to Ned's request, the boys prepared for sudden and unexpected evolutions on the part of the Grey Eagle. They were none too soon, for almost instantly Ned began a series of movements that were calculated to frustrate any attempt on the part of the enemy to successfully launch a missile with telling effect. Darting and dodging hither and thither, the lad gradually drew away from the monoplane, which slackened speed.

With a pull at the controlling levers Ned suddenly began an ascent that quickly carried the Grey Eagle to a level above that of the monoplane. He hoped thereby to gain the advantage of position, but the pilot of the other machine was evidently prepared for just such a move. He sheered off abruptly to one side, as if abandoning the chase.

"There he goes, the coward!" exulted Jimmie, as the Grey Eagle was brought to an even keel at a slight elevation above its rival. "Now see him beat it when he thinks we have the best of him!"

"If you think he's going to leave us alone,"

Jack suggested, "let's get down a ways. It won't be so cold as up here, and we can see the country better. Except for a river or two, I can't distinguish anything down there. We ought to take a look at the place."

"Sure," agreed Harry, "let's travel a little lower."

"Where is the other fellow now?" questioned Ned, as he brought the Grey Eagle downward. "I don't see him in front of us."

"I can see him away off to the right," announced Francois.

"Yes, there he is, as big as life, and twice as natural!" put in Jimmie. "Let me have the binoculars, and I'll see if I can make out who the fellows are. I guess it's getting light enough now so I can see."

After a long examination of the other machine, Jimmie handed the glasses to Harry. He shook his head and glanced quickly at Ned. "I wonder what that fellow thinks of himself," he said presently. "Do you supoose he realizes that other people consider him the worst kind of a sneak? He surely must be case hardened if he doesn't hate himself!"

"If his past actions toward us is any indication," Ned offered, "he probably thinks he

is a fine fellow being heartily abused by four boys."

"Really feels sorry for himself?" Jimmie asked, with contempt.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit! People get queer views sometimes."

"Here he comes back again!" announced Harry, who had the glasses. "He's hitting it up some, too! Looks like he's in an awful hurry!"

Astonished, the boys saw their pursuer heading again for the Grey Eagle, but this time at a much greater altitude. His course was laid so that it would cross that of the machine containing the five boys.

With some anxiety the lads observed the maneuver. Jimmie drew his automatic from its holster, prepared to reply should any more shots be fired in their direction. The clamor of the approaching motor grew louder.

"He's going to cross away above us!" announced Harry, watching closely. "I can see both the pilot and the passenger now," he continued, "and it looks remarkably like The Rat. I believe it is he!"

"Here comes the sun at last!" shouted Jimmie. "I'm glad we can have some more light.

We can tell better what the fellow is doing."

"Guess we'll have to be ready for anything from him!" Harry said, with his eyes still at the glasses. "They're evidently trying to do something up there. The passenger is working away at a part of the machine!"

"What does he seem to be doing?" Jimmie inquired.

"I can't tell from here, but I can see him apparently adjusting something. He seems to be quite busy about it, whatever it is!"

"Maybe he's preparing a bomb or something to drop on us!"

"He's dropping his wrench or something!" cried Harry excitedly. "I can see something flashing in the sunlight as it drops from the bottom of his chassis. There, he's dropped another," he continued.

"What can it be?" wondered Jack. "He can't be dropping tools."

"I see the flash of some more!" announced Jimmie excitedly.

"Why, there are lots of them!" was Harry's astonished statement. "If we don't look out some of them will hit us! Any more speed, Ned?"

"Lot's of it," reassuringly answered Ned,

gazing upward at the other machine, now almost overhead. "It puzzles me, though, what that fellow is dropping. It can't be he had ballast and wants to discharge it."

All the boys were intently observing the oncoming monoplane as it appeared to be following a course at some distance above their own level. The curious flashes of light, as if from falling objects, caused them considerable wonderment. Not for long were they left in doubt.

Directly the monoplane had passed over the Grey Eagle the boys heard a whizzing noise, as of a piece of metal rushing through the air at a high rate of speed. This was followed by several more. Then came a crash aboard the Grey Eagle itself. Ned gave utterance to a cry of pain.

"Jimmie, Jimmie!" he called. "Where are you, Jimmie?"

"Here I am, Ned, what's the matter?" responded the boy.

"Can you take the levers? I can't see a thing! I'm hit!"

Jimmie sprang to the levers at Ned's request, noting with horror that blood was flow-

ing freely into Ned's eyes from a gash in his forehead.

"Jack, Harry, Francois!" cried Jimmie. "Help Ned out of his seat here, so I can sit in. He's badly hurt! Help him quickly!"

Willing hands were extended to Ned's assistance. Guiding him in his efforts to leave the pilot's position, Francois and Harry soon were able to seat Ned in a more favorable place. Jack, meanwhile, had unlocked a box containing a first aid outfit, and now was ready to assist his chum with medical attention, which seemed to be badly needed.

"What was it hit me?" Ned asked presently, as Jack succeeded in stopping the flow of blood. "I saw a flash and heard something strike, then felt a smash right on my forehead. I guess he got me, all right."

"I'll bet I know!" announced Jimmie. "The fellow was dropping a lot of iron bolts or arrows or darts or something. One of 'em fell through the cowl and has smashed the compass. Maybe it was the glass cover of the compass that hit you. I see the bolt now!"

"Where is it?" inquired Harry. "Let me look at it."

"Here it is, sticking through the floor.

Here's the place it went through the cowl, leaving a jagged hole in the metal."

Harry proceeded to extract the bolt from its lodging place, and soon brought it forth for inspection. Jimmie kept a sharp lookout for the other machine, preparing to elude it if it returned.

With a considerable degree of interest the boys examined the object brought forth by Harry. It was a bolt or shaft of iron about nine inches long, and had been provided with a vane at one end, evidently for the purpose of causing it to fall perpendicularly in its flight.

"Gee!" ejaculated Harry. "A few bushels of those things dropped into a regiment of soldiers would play sad havoc! They'd go through a man!"

"You're right, they would!" declared Jack. "If they were dropped from any considerable distance, they'd go through more than a man!"

"Well, Ned, you're lucky the thing didn't hit you instead of the compass," congratulated Harry. "We need both, but you more than the compass, if either is to be spared! I'm glad it wasn't worse!"

"Let's be ready for him if he returns," suggested Jimmie.

"Let's get out of his way!" offered Harry. "We can beat him!"

"Not much!" argued Jimmie. "We don't have to run away! If he comes back again, I'm going to show him that he's monkeying with a buzz saw when he bothers us! If he can drop slugs like that, I can shoot!"

"Bloodthirsty again!" smiled Ned. "Would that be right, Jimmie?"

"Yes, sir!" stoutly maintained Jimmie. "We've got some rights!"

"Well, we won't have much cause to argue about it," Harry announced. "He's heading away off to the northeast and going fast."

"Probably heading for Berlin," suggested Jack. "Let him go!"

"If they leave us alone, we'll be there soon, ourselves!" Ned replied. "I don't think he ever intended to go to Lille at all!"

"I can beat him in a race!" boasted Jimmie. "What speed do you think we are making right now, without half trying?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Ned, glancing over the side.

"Well, I can double that! Keep your eye

on me! See me overhaul that railroad train down below us. It's a passenger or mail train."

"Yes, and it's going some!" Jack stated. "You'll have to hurry!"

Jimmie, in an endeavor to exhibit his skill with the machine, began urging it to greater speed. Up to this time the boys had not endeavored to secure speed, preferring to wait until the engine, so recently from the shop, had been given time to get "down to bearings."

They were expecting great things of the new motor, but were scarcely prepared for the burst of speed which Jimmie coaxed it to yield.

In a few moments they had overhauled the train and were speeding along a short distance ahead of it. Jimmie had brought the craft to a distance but little above the flying locomotive and its burden.

"See him try to beat us!" cried the lad, triumphantly.

"He never can do it," agreed Jack. "Besides, he'll have to slow up for the bridge across that river ahead. That puts him out of the race!"

"Here comes our friend again!" cried Francois, pointing.

"Well, of all things!" declared Jimmie. "He's got nerve!"

"Keep yours, and show him what a Wolf can do," advised Ned.

Nodding his acknowledgment, Jimmie began an ascent which he hoped would carry him above the approaching enemy. He was not quick enough, however, to execute this maneuver, and contented himself with flying directly ahead at an increased altitude. Unconsciously the boy still followed the line of the railroad as it approached the river ahead. The train had now been left a mile or more behind.

Anxiously watching the enemy, the boys observed that he was about to attempt to cross above them once more. More arrows were expected.

Harry had trained his glasses upon the approaching machine, and from time to time announced the movements of the pilot and his passenger.

He's almost overhead now," reported the lad. "The passenger is trying to fix another

batch of arrows, I believe! Get ready for him!"

Jimmie determined to execute a daring maneuver to throw the pursuer off his trail. Calling to the boys to secure themselves with safety belts, he buckled on his own, then gave the levers a touch.

With the first impulse of the engine the Grey Eagle leaped ahead. Jimmie threw his whole weight on the lever controlling the horizontal rudders, and the machine climbed up at an agle that threatened to unseat the passengers. Apparently his motive was to ram the other machine.

With a quick movement he threw off the power, altering the rudders at the same moment. The Grey Eagle began to drop backwards toward the earth. Again Jimmie manipulated a lever and the rudders guided the craft into a complete backward somersault that brought them some distance to the rear of the other. Gasping at the sudden movement the boys stared about.

A roar came to their ears from below. Mingled with a cloud of thick black smoke they could see pieces of timbers falling where once

had been the railroad bridge. The missile had passed them, thanks to Jimmie.

"The train!" gasped Jimmie, with a startled look at his friends.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Journey With Joffre.

"They'll go right into that wrecked bridge!" gasped Jack, with horror. "Can't we head 'em off? Swing around, Jimmie, and flag 'em!"

"Sure," urged Harry excitedly. "Hurry! Hurry!"

Jimmie was already tugging desperately at the levers. He brought the Grey Eagle about so sharply that the machine careened to a most alarming angle, threatening to execute another upside down movement.

By throwing his weight sharply against the lever controlling the vanes, however, Jimmie avoided the completion of this reverse, and brought the machine again to its normal position. Heading back over the course they had so recently traveled, he brought the machine low down and skimmed along at a swift pace only a short distance above the track.

In plain view now, the onrushing train rushed madly along with its burden. Plainly the engine crew were doing their utmost to

cover as much ground in as little time as lay within their power.

An immense cloud of black smoke was vomited from the stack, tossed upward by the sharp exhaust. It trailed like an ever-growing streamer, hiding the coaches from the view of our friends.

"How shall we stop them?" questioned Ned sharply. "We haven't a red flag nor anything with which to signal them."

"Swing 'em down!" suggested Harry eagerly. "They'll stop!"

"I don't know whether the French railroad men understand the signals used on United States roads or not!" Ned replied. "They're getting closer and we must do something!" he added.

"Land on the track and they'll stop!" proposed Jack.

"Sure!" put in Jimmie with sarcasm. "After they run over us!"

"What can we do?" Ned cried. "We must stop them!"

"Francois, what signal will these Frenchmen understand?" asked Jimmie. "Shall we swing 'em down, or have you anything to suggest?"

"Oh, I don't know," cried Francois. "I don't understand the railroad signals well enough to know what to do."

"I'll tell you what," Jimmie ventured, "I'll swing off to one side, round to quickly, and run alongside the locomotive. As we draw up alongside, you call out to the engineer to stop. He'll understand French. Get your lungs ready for a big whoop, there's lots of noise."

Francois began drawing deep breaths, preparing for the effort.

The Grey Eagle was veered away from the tracks to a distance considered by Jimmie suitable for his purpose, and again quickly wheeled about. This time the boys were prepared for the sharp deflection of the planes, and assisted by throwing their bodies to the outer side of the turn.

Slightly miscalculating the speed of the onrushing train, Jimmie brought the Grey Eagle parallel to its course at a point some two car lengths behind the locomotive. A quick touch of the throttle soon carried them out of the cloud of smoke and cinders abreast of the driver, who leaned from his position interestedly watching the maneuvers of the great aeroplane.

Scarcely a mile separated the group from the wrecked bridge. This distance was rapidly lessened by the swift iron monster.

"Hurry, now, Francois!" shouted Jimmie, again applying the muffler to deaded the sound of the Grey Eagle's motors. "Tell him!"

Francois' shouts were plainly heard by the engine driver, but he evidently mistook them for some friendly greeting, for he smiled and waved his hand, as if congratulating the boys on their skill.

Ned was frantic. He waved his arms and pointed down the track. Again the engineer responded with a wave of his hand. Seemingly he thought the boys were inviting him to a race, and was waving his acceptance.

"You big mud-head!" yelled Jimmie, at the top of his lungs. "Can't you get anything through that chunk of ivory? Shut her off!"

This sally was, of course, not intelligible to the engine driver, who could not be expected to understand English. The boy's manner, however, appeared to convey a meaning different from that of his companions. A change came over the face of the driver. He glanced down the track.

"Shut her off! Shut her off!" yelled Jimmie, again swinging one hand in the well-known horizontal sweep known to all railroad men in this country, indicating "Stop." Again and again Jimmie repeated the sign.

Ned, Harry and Jack, catching the inspiration of Jimmie's energetic action, joined in making the same signal. This concerted effort on the part of the boys evidently conveyed to the engine driver the thought that something was wrong. He looked questioningly at the lads.

"Shut her off!" again yelled Jimmie, desperately shaking his fist at the driver. "If I ever get hold of you, I'll punch your dome!"

Ned ceased making the stop sign and frantically pointed ahead. He then moved his hands as if picking something from his left with his right, in the familiar "Uncouple" movement of railroaders.

As if comprehending the "cut off" or "uncouple" signal, and at the same time comprehending that something was wrong with the track, the driver closed the throttle, looking down the line of rails ahead.

What he saw caused him to make desperate efforts to stop the onrushing monster. His

efforts were rewarded by a distinct slackening of speed, but he was not a moment too soon.

Carried onward by the extreme momentum of its flight, the train crowded the locomotive forward, until it seemed to the anxious boys as if it surely must be plunged into the open bridge. Bravely the driver remained at his post until the locomotive actually dropped from the spread rails.

Not until his charge had bumped onto the ties and careened drunkenly to one side did the driver leap for safety. His fall on the ballasted track came only as the train ground to a standstill.

Again swinging the Grey Eagle in a quick turn, this time more easily and gracefully made, Jimmie brought the aeroplane to a landing beside the coaches. Men were dropping from the cars as the boys settled easily to a position of rest. They came running across the intervening space. They were in uniform and several carried rifles.

Taking in the entire situation at a glance, an officer stepped forward to greet the lads. With outstretched hand he greeted Ned, who

stood a trifle in advance of his companions. He spoke in French.

Ned grasped the proffered hand heartily, but shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he stated, "but I cannot understand you."

"Pardon me," the officer hastened to say in English. "I did not notice that you are not of my country. I wish to thank you for the brave and honorable deed you have just done."

"Your gratitude is certainly appreciated," Ned answered, "but we scarcely deserve it. It was partly our fault that the bridge was wrecked. If we hadn't been over the railroad, the bomb would not have done that damage. We couldn't do any less than try to stop you."

"Nevertheless, we are all grateful for your act," continued the officer, "and I must also compliment you on your skill as a pilot. You handled the aeroplane with exceeding ease and adroitness."

"You'll have to give Jimmie, here, credit for that," Ned replied with a smile, as he proceeded to introduce his chums.

Protesting his inability to perform any

feats out of the ordinary, Jimmie was dragged blushing to the foreground, where he was made to listen again to the complimentary remarks concerning his ability as an aviator.

"But come with me," invited the officer presently. "I wish you to meet the General. You are fortunate in finding him here at this time."

Making their way through the groups of soldiers gathered about, the boys arrived at a car much better appointed than the others. Here were grouped several officers surrounding a studily built man of medium height. His white hair and mustache gave a touch of dignity to the rounded face, while flashing eyes betokened the vigor that lurked in his well-knit frame, and indicated one of the secrets of his power with men. He was no less a person than General Joffre, pride of the French army.

Approaching to a respectful distance, the boys stood at attention and gave the Boy Scout salute. This was returned at once by the General, who used the same salute with dignity and gravity.

A few words spoken by the officer who had

conducted the boys from their machine served to explain who they were.

"I wish to thank you, gentlemen," said the General. "You have, indeed, averted a catastrophe, and we are very grateful."

"Please do not mention it, sir!" Ned protested. "We felt that we could not do otherwise than stop your train, if possible."

"But how do you happen to be in this vicinity?"

In a few words, Ned briefly recounted the adventures through which they had passed but a short time previously. Leaving out many details, he gave only an outline of the incidents, concluding with:

"And here we are, and this wrecked bridge is the result of The Rat's latest attempt to put us out of his way."

"A most remarkable recital!" commented the General, after listening with interest to Ned's story. "You may be sure of our assistance in capturing this person, if it is at all possible."

"Thank you!" returned Ned heartily. "Now, perhaps, we have done all we can. I think we shall have to be going."

"Just a moment," protested the General.

"Our men have already attached telegraph instruments to the wires and have, no doubt, reported this damage to the bridge. Will you not wait a short time until we learn what measures will be taken to move the train forward?"

To this the boys readily consented, and watched with interest the rapidity with which the men working the telegraph secured results.

Shortly an orderly approached, saluted, and handed a paper to the General. Reading the message rapidly, he turned again to the boys.

"It is impossible," he stated with a show of slight impatience in his voice, "to secure transportation for some hours. Traffic beyond the bridge is in a congested condition, and a repair train cannot reach us for some time. The delay, while annoying, is unavoidable. I shall again thank you, and wish you every success!"

Extending his hand, the General indicated that the interview was at an end. With hearty handclasps the boys departed for their aeroplane, leaving the soldiers grouped about the General.

Just as Ned was about to start the engine,

Jimmie leaned over and placed a detaining hand on his arm. Ned glanced quickly at the boy.

"Say, fellows," suggested Jimmie. "If the General is in a hurry to go somewhere, he can't do better than take a trip with us. What do you say to inviting him to have a little ride?"

"We can carry him, all right," responded Ned, "but the quarters will be rather cramped. We haven't room to entertain many visitors."

"If we can stand it, he ought to get along for a while!"

"All right, then, go ask him if you want to," Ned grinned.

In an instant Jimmie was on the ground racing toward the train. Not many minutes passed before he was seen returning, accompanied by the General and the officer who had first greeted them.

To the rousing cheers of the soldiers, the Grey Eagle, with its precious freight, rose above the wreckage of the bridge. Headed to the northward, the boys and their guests were soon far from the scene.

"Where will you go, General?" asked Ned from the pilot's seat.

"Here comes that monoplane again!" interrupted Harry, who had been using the binoculars. "He's coming up fast from the eastward!"

"Then he's going to get what's coming to him!" gritted Jimmie, unlocking a compartment and drawing forth a magazine rifle.

It was true. The monoplane was again darting toward the Grey Eagle, as if vindictively determined to bring harm to the lads.

As it approached a shot rang out. Jimmie quickly threw his rifle to his shoulder and replied with shot after shot.

A sharp lurch of the other machine told the boys that one of Jimmie's missiles had found lodgment in a vital place. Plunging down in a forward movement the machine appeared to drop straight to earth.

"The Rat is there!" cried Harry, with the glasses in hand. "He's taking the levers away from the wounded pilot! He can't right the machine!"

CHAPTER XVII.

The Rat Repulsed.

Straight toward the earth, like a hawk darting for its prey, fell the monoplane, carrying the wounded pilot and The Rat.

In fancy the boys pictured the terrible scene soon to be witnessed at the spot where the craft should fall with its human freight. Jimmie, horrified to think that his act should have caused the loss of two men's lives, turned to replace the rifle, anxious to get the weapon with which the attack had been repulsed out of his grasp.

Even the General, experienced to scenes of unusual gruesomeness as he was, turned his head aside, not caring to witness the end.

All were startled to activity and attention by Harry's shout.

"Look, look!" cried the lad, who had followed with the glasses the descent of their enemy. "Look, he's made it! Oh, I'm glad!"

"What?" Ned asked, his attention having been directed toward bringing the Grey Eagle to a position near the expected event.

"The Rat must have succeeded in getting control of the craft just in time," explained Harry. "Just as I thought it would plunge to the earth the forward rudders caught the air, and instead of diving head first into the ground, the machine took a sudden swoop and skimmed away as nicely as you please! That was simply wonderful!"

Sighs of relief escaped the lads involuntarily as this news was announced. Much as The Rat deserved punishment for his misdeeds, none of the boys cared to be directly responsible for his sudden demise in such a horrible form. They preferred turning him over to the proper authorities where he might be properly dealt with.

"I guess he's going to have his hands full now," suggested Ned musingly. "Possibly we'd better get out of here as quickly as we can. The General will want to arrive at his destination without delay."

"Sure enough!" Jimmie asserted. "Where will you go, General?"

"My intended destination," replied the General, "is an aviation center not far from here in the direction of Lille. There many aeroplanes are being received from the factories

for testing, and used in the instruction of pilots for military purposes. If you will be kind enough to give me passage to that point, I shall be very grateful."

"Certainly we will," quickly responded Ned. "Can you give me the directions?" he continued. "We will make up some lost time."

"I think if you steer about northeast or northeast by north," suggested the General, "we shall soon see the place."

"Sorry, sir," apologized Ned, "but the chap in the other machine dropped some darts a few minutes ago and wrecked our compass. I can steer only approximately on any course. Would you recognize landmarks?"

"Possibly," rejoined the General. "However, it is now about seven o'clock. The sun, there, is about east by south, so we can get a course from that. If you steer for a hill or group of trees until nearly above them, and then select some other prominent point in the landscape and steer for that, we shall shortly arrive close enough to the destination so that we can see some of the numerous aviators in their practice work."

"That's a good idea!" Ned acknowledged.

"I shall do that, and shall hurry along a little. Possibly we may shake off The Rat."

Never had the boys felt the sense of pride in their aeroplane that they did that day. The engine, designed by Harry and his chums, proved to be all that they had expected. Running with muffler closed, Ned sent the plane along at a terrific pace. Above the whistling of the wind the hum of the motor was not distinguishable, and conversation could be carried on with comparative ease. Without a tremor the great machine covered mile after mile with a grace and speed that excited the frank admiration of their two guests. It was a ride to be remembered.

"We need several machines like this!" exclaimed General Joffre, lost in wonderment at the behavior of the craft. "Will you tell me what make it is? The design is one not familiar to me."

"It is a design familiar to nobody," Ned smiled, "except we four boys. It is a machine constructed by us from our own designs."

"I am astonished!" confessed the General. "It is wonderful to observe how easily it handles and how rapid its movements. Will you tell me what make of engine you are using?"

"It is an engine designed specially for us by McGraw, Bosworth, Stevens and Nestor, a United States concern!" laughed Ned. "You see," he went on, "when the plane had been thought of, we believed we needed an engine suitable for a craft of so high a character. We couldn't find what we wanted in any store, nor was it manufactured. We just had to make plans and have it built in the automobile factory belonging to Harry's father. They did a pretty good job for us, too!"

To this statement the General heartily assented, expressing freely his admiration for the entire craft and its appointments.

"Unless I am mistaken," presently declared the General, who had been dividing his attention between admiration of the Grey Eagle and the landscape, "we are approaching the vicinity of the place I mentioned. That range of hills ahead should be the last before we reach the plain where the aviation instructors are at work."

"Hurrah!" shouted Jimmie. "Now we'll see some real flying! I've always wanted to see the French aviators. Maybe I can get a few pointers by watching them. I understand they're among the very best."

"Yes," admitted the General, "I can honestly say that we have some very skillful and daring men in the aviation corps. You may remember it was a Frenchman who first succeeded in crossing the English channel in an aircraft. Their exploits are many and of noble character."

"It's funny how The Rat got a French chauffeur to help him out!" mused Jimmie. "I thought the Frenchmen as a rule were more honest."

"Possibly misrepresentations were made," suggested Ned. "You know The Rat wouldn't be above lying a little!"

"That's so," assented Jimmie. "By the way," he added, "where did The Rat go? We left in such a hurry I never noticed."

"He made a landing," Harry answered. "I saw him come easily to earth, and then I lost sight of him as we put on speed. We've lost him!"

"Well, I certainly hope so!" emphatically declared Jimmie. "The next time we see him I hope it will be through a prison grating!"

"You will probably not have the opportunity of seeing your enemy for some little time," commented their guest. "He is no doubt by

this time well on his way towards Flanders!"

"Flanders?" mused Jimmie. "I don't recall any such town as that. I'm not very well posted on the geography of France, though."

"Flanders is a country, not a town," kindly corrected the General. "It is a name used to designate the country called Belgium."

"Oh, I know where that is!" declared Jimmie at once. "That is between France and Germany, isn't it? They stopped the Germans!"

"Yes," sadly replied his informant, "they checked the German advance, but at fearful cost to themselves. It was done in an endeavor to protect their neutrality. The first encounter occurred at Liege."

"Another case of demanding peace, even at the expense of a fight!" put in Jack. "That's Jimmie's creed!" he added.

"Why do they call the country 'Flanders'?" asked Jimmie.

"'Flanders,'" replied the other, "is a name derived from an old nickname or appellation for the people who inhabited that section. For a long time the people who lived there were known as 'Fleed-men,' or men who had escaped from other countries. The name gradu-

ally was turned into the present form of 'Flemish,' and the country known as 'Flanders'."

"Then the people are made up of contributions from other nations?" inquired Jimmie, very much interested. "They were all mixed up?"

"Yes," was the answer, "but many, many years have passed, and gradually there has grown up a distinct nation. Of course, the country, because of its peculiar position, has long been the scene of international fighting. It is said that Caesar and his legions had battle there with the original inhabitants, called the Nervii. Many a battle has been fought at different times on Flemish territory."

"Isn't the battleground of Waterloo where Napoleon met defeat, located in Flanders?" asked Ned, recalling his history.

"It is," replied their guest, "and also other famous battlegrounds. For many years Flanders has been the scene of much warfare."

"Do they talk English there?" questioned Jimmie eagerly.

"The people speak French, German or Flemish in different sections," was the answer. "English is not commonly used. The

people cling tenaciously to their language, customs and superstitions. It is in that section," continued their informant, "where so many fairy tales originated. The inhabitants largely hold firm faith in the existence and activities of sprites, witches, fairies and hobgoblins of all sorts. With their other primitive ideas, they also hold to the cardinal virtues of honesty, sobriety and industry. Nowhere, except possibly in Holland, will you find a more industrious and worthy class of people."

"It seems too bad to have good folks like those shot up by the Germans, just because they wanted to go across the country!" protested Jimmie. "Couldn't Germany have gone around some other way?"

A faint smile greeted this characteristic remark.

"Possibly," agreed the other, "but it seems the more direct route was chosen. It is regrettable, of course, but, for that matter, the whole war is regrettable. It brings good to no one."

"I agree with you!" quickly responded the boy. "It's no good!"

"Sail—Ho!" cried Harry, who had been in-

dustriously using the binoculars while listening to the conversation. "I see an aeroplane!"

"Where away?" asked Ned, scanning the horizon eagerly.

"Almost dead ahead," replied Harry. "Just a little to the left and above that hill. It is just above the trees."

"I see it!" declared Ned. "I can't make out what it is like, though. It looks something like a biplane, but I'm not sure."

"That's what it is!" asserted Harry. "You've got good eyes!"

"Maybe it's some fellow from the aviation camp out for a trial run or else breaking in a new pilot," suggested Jimmie.

"If that's the case," Jack put in, "we are near the place. I'm glad of that! I'm interested in the idea of seeing the French craft."

"Keep your eyes open, then," advised Harry. "It looks as if we were going to cross the hill in a minute, and then we'll know!"

"I see them!" shouted Jack in a short time. "I see a lot of them! Oh-h-h!" exclaimed the boy excitedly, "there must be fifty machines, and all in the air at once! It looks like a beehive!"

"Just see those hangars!" was Ned's excited

comment. "There must be nearly a hundred of them!" he continued in an awed tone.

"Not quite a hundred," laughed the General, "but there are quite a number. More machines are arriving daily, while others are either broken in practice or are sent away for duty at the front."

Admiringly the boys gazed at the inspiring spectacle of so great a number of aeroplanes in the air at one time. Their interest knew no bounds. Here was an opportunity for gaining much information.

All too soon was the Grey Eagle in the vicinity of the camp. Its coming was detected by some of the air scouts almost as quickly as the camp had been located by the boys. Several at once advanced and hovered near, in an effort to learn the identity of the visitor.

Proceeding directly to a spot indicated by the General, Ned brought the machine gracefully and easily to the ground. A group of aviators and officers quickly surrounded them and assisted the passengers to alight. Recognizing the General, they set up a hearty cheer.

Turning to an officer in his immediate vicin-

ity, the General spent several minutes in animated conversation. Apparently he was questioning that individual closely concerning important matters.

At length he turned to the boys with a smile on his face.

"You may rest easy on one score, at least," he said. "Your friend, The Rat, made his way into Flanders about half an hour ago!"

"How do you know?" asked Jimmie incredulously.

CHAPTER XVIII.

An Interrupted Race.

"My information comes from the officer, here, replied the General, with a smile at the boy's pertinent query. "He states that an observer near the boundary reports by telephone that a monoplane resembling that used by The Rat was seen crossing to the eastward only a few minutes previous to our arrival here. He was traveling high and rapidly."

"In that case, we'd better get going ourselves," urged Jack.

"But I want to stay here a while and watch these French airmen," Jimmie objected. "Besides, it wouldn't be polite to go away so soon. The General hasn't had a chance to ask us to lunch," he added, with a wink at Ned who was standing near.

"Same old cold, I suppose," protested Jack. "You had a lunch only a few hours ago, and now you're hungry again! What's the matter?"

"Hunger seems to be an affliction from which Jimmie always suffers," laughed Ned. "I'm sure I don't know what to do!"

"That's not an affliction," maintained Jimmie, joining in the spirit of the chaffing, "that's what they call a disease!"

"It's chronic, whatever you call it!" asserted Harry.

"Well, it's a mighty good thing you fellows have me to be your alarm clock, anyhow!" stoutly returned Jimime. "If it wasn't for me to remind you once in awhile, you'd forget to eat. I'm useful!"

Laughingly giving instructions that the boys should be well supplied with breakfast, the General asked to be excused for a short time. He at once retired, in company with the officer who seemed to be in command of the camp, to a building set apart for office purposes.

The boys walked about, under the guidance of a non-commissioned officer who had been detailed for the purpose, inspecting the new aeroplanes arriving in cases from the factory, those already assembled, and a number which had been tested. They saw several machines which had been badly damaged, some by reason of defects and others by unskillful handling by novices. A number of aspiring candidates were being given practical instruction

in aviation by experienced men. None of the recruits were permitted to take charge of a machine until after several flights had been made in company with their instructors. Then they were given charge of a machine and permitted to make their first flight unaccompanied. Jimmie declared that his fingers itched to have charge of one of the larger machines intended for attack. The small scouting machines did not interest him.

The large planes were built with space for mounting a machine gun, with room for its operator and a supply of ammunition. Above the gunner's seat the pilot was located, where he could get an excellent view of his surroundings and direct the craft as desired by the gunner.

A bugle call attracted their attention. Their guide announced, through Francois, who acted as interpreter, that lunch was ready.

"I declare, I nearly forgot I was hungry!" asserted Jimmie.

"It's mighty interesting!" agreed Ned. "But I don't think they have anything the better of our little old Grey Eagle, when it comes to ease of handling and speed. We can show

any of them a clean pair of heels when that engine gets nicely smoothed up!"

"Right you are, Scout!" Jimmie returned vigorously. "And they haven't any of them got anything on me when it comes to eating! Advance, Comrades!" he continued with a laugh. "Let us attack the cold cure!"

Before the boys had devoured the splendid luncheon provided for them under the direction of the commander, they were again visited by their recent passenger. He had been very busy during the short interval and, as the boys later learned, had gotten in touch with the entire battle front by means of telegraph and telephone. Orders had been issued with whirlwind promptness, and information received, to be glanced at only once ere it was safely stored in the master mind.

Long after their visit the boys learned to value the ability of the man whom all France was depending upon to bring her out of the terrible crisis in which she was then placed.

After inquiring if their wants had been properly supplied, the General approached Ned on a subject that the lad had anticipated would be mentioned. It was one that he dreaded.

Seating himself at Ned's invitation, the General began:

"What do you think of our little camp by this time?"

"It is great!" heartily responded Ned. "I like it!"

"And the principle, is it not a correct one?"

"I think so," replied the lad. "I believe it is a grand idea to teach the men everything possible about the matter before sending them out on the firing line. Do they seem to learn readily?"

"Yes," was the answer, "but we are in need of one thing. We must have more instructors! There are not enough men who can teach!"

What Ned dreaded he saw all too plainly was coming.

"Do you not perceive our need of men?" continued his questioner.

"Yes, sir, I can," returned Ned. Then, as if determined to meet the issue squarely, he went on, looking straight into the other's face:

"If it were not for the fact that we are citizens of the United States and, therefore, neutral, I would be delighted to offer my services

in any way they might be used. We are on a mission that requires our time and utmost energy, however, and it would be out of the question for us even to think of such a possibility."

For just a moment no answer was made. The two sat gazing silently across the table. At length the General spoke in a lower tone:

"You are right, my lad! Loyalty to your country and her needs should always be your first consideration. Let principle be of far greater moment than any pecuniary gain, and you cannot go far wrong!"

So saying he arose and extended his hand to Ned. In that firm clasp Ned detected the emotion that swept over this master of men, who carried the responsibility of a nation at that moment on his shoulders.

Long afterward he declared that one of the proudest moments of his life was the one in which he and Joffre clasped hands across the table in the aviation camp. From that time his efforts to instil into the minds of his comrades ideas of patriotism and loyalty increased.

After giving instructions that the boys should be well cared for during such time as they wished to remain, the General prepared

to go about his duties. As he was leaving, Ned asked:

"We feel that we must continue our chase of The Rat and try to prevent his selling the plans to any other nation. He is, no doubt, on his way to Berlin, and we ought to follow. Can you give us a pass to go through or over your lines with the Grey Eagle?"

"That is impossible," returned the other. "No one but the regular aviators are permitted to do that, and then only under orders. If, however, you should make such a move without my knowledge or consent, I could not prevent it. The men in the trenches will have orders not to fire on any aeroplane like the Grey Eagle if a white cross is painted on the lower side of the planes. There is plenty of white paint here."

Expressing their sincere thanks, the boys left the General and proceeded to their sight-seeing. Jimmie was very anxious to find the paint pot and brush, declaring he could take a hint easily. This was easily arranged, and in a short time two large white crosses were on the lower side of the Grey Eagle's planes, where they could be easily seen.

"You have quite a machine there," politely suggested a pilot.

"Thank you," replied Ned, with Francois interpreting.

"Perhaps it is quite swift?" continued the other.

Ned shrugged his shoulders. He did not wish to boast.

"I believe my monoplane is able to travel faster," stated the other. "I am a firm believer in the merits of a monoplane!"

"Possibly," replied Ned, a little nettled at the fellow's insistence. "We are satisfied. Our machine carries a heavy load."

"What do you say to a little race?" questioned the pilot.

"What shall we do, boys?" queried Ned, turning to his companions. "Shall we keep still and let him have his own way or not?"

"I should say not!" vociferated Jimmie, bridling at once. "If you let him get away with anything like that, he'll take the whole house next! I say we'd better show him a trick or two. We can do it!"

"Maybe not," cautioned Jack. "These fellows are pretty smooth!"

"They haven't got anything on the little old

Grey Eagle when it comes to getting out of the road. Some day I'll show you!"

"Well, I vote we show this gentleman right now!" urged Harry.

It was accordingly agreed that a trial race was to be run between the machine owned by the boys and that of the French pilot. Quickly the news went round the camp, and by the time preparations had been made everyone was keenly alert. The boys went carefully over every part of their machine, examining every guy and fastening.

At last the Grey Eagle was pronounced ready, and final instructions were given as to the course. It was agreed that as a test of all the qualities necessary in a machine a message should be carried to an outpost on the firing line not many miles to the eastward. An officer there would give a receipt for the message, and the return of the receipt to the camp would determine which machine was the winner.

"Be careful, boys," cautioned Francois. "I think the pilot is telephoning to a friend of his to have a receipt ready written and put up on a hoop on a long pole, after the manner of your American train order deliveries. He can then drop his message, pick up the receipt,

and beat you without being required to land at all!"

"Did you hear him telephoning?" asked Jimmie indignantly.

"Just now!" replied Francois. "He has but just left the booth!"

"Then we'll fix him!" declared Jimmie. "I'll report him!"

"Please do not!" begged Francois. "It would only make trouble!"

"In that case, Ned, we've got to beat this fellow by some few minutes. He's going to try to win the race by a trick!"

"Evidently we've got him scared!" laughed Ned.

"It looks that way, surely!" agreed Jimmie.

After receiving explicit instructions regarding the location of the point where the messages were to be delivered, the boys mounted their machine. Ned followed the example of the Frenchman, and warmed his engine well before announcing that he was ready.

Several had advised Ned to remove some weight from his craft before starting, and also strongly advised against carrying four passengers. To these objections, however, Ned returned but one answer. He had agreed

to run the race in ordinary condition, and he would not now retreat.

At a pistol shot, fired as the starting signal, both machines seemed to leap into the air. Ned had opened the muffler for the start, and Jimmie declared afterward that a stream of fire a mile long burst from the exhaust pipe. The roar of the Grey Eagle's motor completely drowned out the noise of the monoplane. In a short time the camp had been left far in the rear. The Grey Eagle easily took the lead and steadily gained on the rival air craft, in spite of the Frenchman's best efforts. He was using every trick and device of which he was master.

Soon Harry, who had been using the binoculars constantly, announced that he could see a group of men standing in a field, evidently watching for the coming of the machines. They were grouped near some trees.

Ned prepared to make a quick landing. He saw, however, upon nearing the ground that the spot did not offer suitable advantages and rose again. Continuing over a slight wooded rise, he found an open space which seemed satisfactory. Here he made an excellent landing.

"Stay where you are," he cried, springing to the ground. "I'll run back through these trees and get a receipt for the message."

"That will give the monoplane an advantage!" cried Jimmie. "They picked that poor landing spot because he doesn't have to stop!"

"That's some trick, I must say!" chimed in Harry.

Ned ran rapidly back toward the group of men. He could see the monoplane descending and noted the preparations for delivery of the receipt.

"Halt!" a voice commanded, coming from the ground at Ned's feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

Captured and Under Fire.

Startled by the unusual circumstance of a human voice coming, apparently, from the very earth at his feet, the boy paused in wonderment. He glanced inquiringly about, searching for the owner of the voice.

No one appeared, and thinking it either a trick of his imagination or the work of some ventriloquist who desired to play a joke upon him, Ned again started up the slight rise, intending to hasten toward the group of officers, where he would get the receipt for his message.

Already the droning of the monoplane's motors told him that there was need of haste if he would make the return trip to the Grey Eagle and hope to even overtake his rival before reaching the aviation camp. Impatient at the trick he thought had been played Ned fumed.

"Halt!" again came the command, and apparently from the same direction. No one was in sight, and Ned was plainly puzzled.

Glancing along the slope to his right, he saw what at first sight seemed to be the opening into a burrow of a fox or wolf or some other creature of similar habits. Curiously enough, Ned detected a pair of eyes peering forth from the darkness of the excavation.

With a start the boy realized, however, that the rifle barrel protruding from the cavity was not the property of fox or wolf, but indicated the presence of a human being. A closer glance showed him that the eyes were not those of a wild animal, but belonged to a man. A glint of metal and flash of color from the blackness behind the small opening betokened a uniform. Ned's thoughts rioted frantically.

His first impulse was to turn and hasten from the spot as rapidly as his legs would carry him, but he realized that the man with the rifle was a determined character, and might not hesitate to shoot.

A volley of questions issued forth from the opening, but the language was one unfamiliar to Ned, and he could only shake his head.

"I cannot understand you," he at length ventured. "Can you speak English? Perhaps we might understand each other better if you can."

"English?" repeated the man from his location. "Yes, I speak English very good!" This statement was belied by his accent and pronunciation, but Ned accepted it at its face value, giving his whole attention to the matter of carrying on the halting conversation.

"Why do you stop me?" Ned asked. "How did you get in there?"

"We stop all spies coming from the Germans!" replied the voice. "You will remain where you are and my comrade will appear!"

"That's nice!" scorned Ned hotly. "Why, you are entirely mistaken! I have never been in Germany! I am from the United States!"

"You have had a long journey," replied the other, with mock sympathy, "and will need a rest before proceeding. Therefore, we will be glad to have you accept the hospitality of our poor quarters!"

"But I am from the aviation camp to the westward of here. I am in a race with a French air pilot, and you will cause me to lose the race!" stormed Ned, beginning to see that the fellow meant to detain him.

"We have very comfortable quarters!" urged the other.

"Well, occupy them, then!" snapped Ned. "I am going on!"

"Listen!" commanded the other. "Unless you accept our so freely offered hospitality of the drawing room, we shall be obliged to put you to sleep in one of our nice new beds. They are quite comfortable, I assure you. No one of the occupants has ever complained!"

Ned caught the significance of the remark, and decided that he did not care to become a lodger with this man as landlord. He knew full well why none of the tenants mentioned ever complained of the quarters. The tenants referred to would never complain again of any quarters.

Wisely concluding that nothing would be gained by further efforts to convince the fellow of his identity, Ned put away all thought of immediate escape, and with it also laid aside the cherished hope of beating the French pilot and his monoplane. That must wait.

A man in uniform appeared from behind a clump of bushes a short distance to the right with such startling suddenness that Ned nearly lost his composure. He carried a rope and approached Ned with a smile. Ned held

up a protesting hand and waved away the bond.

"You don't have to tie me up!" he said. "I'll go with you peaceably. I shall not try to run away from such good landlords!"

"Will you not step into the parlor?" suggested the newcomer.

Believing compliance with their wishes the only way to placate them, Ned followed his captor to the clump of bushes, behind which he discovered a narrow shaft leading downwards into the earth. Steps, uneven but firm, were cut into the sloping side, affording sure footing.

Under a low lintel Ned stooped and found himself in a sort of cave or cellar, the sides propped and supported by short lengths of small saplings, the roof braced with larger logs, the only opening, the burrow-like hole in the hillside, providing light and ventilation.

A bunk with straw for mattress afforded sleeping accommodation, while straw was plentifully strewn on the floor, making a fine rug.

"I do not understand the arrangement," Ned began, as he surveyed the interior of the

place. "What is the idea? Why bring me here?"

"If I had not captured you, another might have been minded to put you to sleep!" replied the first speaker. "Not all of the men in the trenches are considerate of Germans, but I liked your looks, and so you are here now instead of fast asleep," he added, tapping his rifle and smiling significantly, while he still looked out from his window.

"Germans are not usually welcome in the drawing room," added the other soldier, "and they are put to sleep as soon as possible!"

"But I'm not a German!" protested Ned vigorously.

"No?" inquired the other politely. "Listen a moment, I hear an officer approaching. We shall soon learn if you are a 'Bosche'!"

Ned was startled to discover a fourth person in the narrow confines of the place. The late arrival was evidently an officer.

Saluting, the two occupants of the burrow began a report in French concerning their captive. Evidently full details were being asked and given, for the conversation consumed much time.

"Come with me," the officer said to Ned

at length, as he turned toward an opening that had heretofore escaped the lad's attention.

"But, officer," protested the boy, "my comrades are out there, waiting for me to return! I cannot leave them!"

A few words of command from the officer caused both soldiers to make hasty preparations for departure. They were evidently about to sally forth to capture the crew of the Grey Eagle. Ned fumed. He had been very foolish, he thought, to make so rash a statement.

The officer indicated that Ned was to proceed into the passageway.

For some distance they passed through a tunnel-like opening, scarcely large enough for a full-grown person to negotiate. At intervals an opening, somewhat similar to the one first seen by Ned, gave ventilation and light. It served the double purpose of window and loop-hole, the officer explained, in case Germans should venture too near. Once, as he paused to look forth from one of the openings, he called Ned's attention to a clump of trees some little distance away.

"Can you see that man moving about?" he

questioned. "Yes? Well, presently you will see him throw up his arms and fall. Our sharpshooters will get him! Your men are too reckless. They expose themselves too much! Now he is preparing a position for one of your guns. Tonight your friends will drag up to that clump of trees a gun this big," he formed his arms into a circle. "Then the ranges will be given them, and they will start shelling these trenches. After they have demolished our so hardly earned resting places, they will charge. Tomorrow night they will charge. Then they will occupy these trenches —perhaps!"

"My friends haven't got a gun, except an automatic pistol and a rifle!" protested Ned. "We will not charge the trenches, because we do not know they are here. If your man had not stopped me I would never have suspected that this hillside was undermined as it is!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the officer, eyeing Ned closely. "Perhaps you tell the truth. But come," he added, "we must proceed."

Not far from where they were standing a larger excavation had been made, and this was fitted up more luxuriously than the other. A mirror was on the wall, a stove in the corner, and a telephone instrument rested on an

upturned box near the bunks. As they approached, shouts of laughter greeted their ears. Evidently the life in the underground passages had not destroyed the soldiers' sense of humor.

Turning a corner, the cause of the merriment was at once apparent. One soldier was seated on an empty provision case, his face covered with lather. Another stood beside him, endeavoring to play the part of a barber, but with very indifferent success, judging by the expletives from the lathered one. All seemed hugely enjoying the circumstance.

As the officer entered he called out a low order. Instantly every man was on his feet standing at attention. Even the lathered soldier stood. Simultaneously their hands were raised in military salute, and remained so until the salute had been returned by the officer.

Picking up the telephone, the officer spoke rapidly for a few moments, then replaced the instrument and directed a question to the man watching from the window. That individual replied at some length, pointing out toward the same clump of trees that had been indicated to Ned by the officer himself. Evidently something unusual was taking place.

A sharp exclamation from the soldier on watch brought the others to their feet. He was excitedly pointing toward the trees and speaking rapidly. Ned saw a cloud of white smoke appear in the grove.

Following the glances of the men, he was startled to see hurtling through the air a large black object. It appeared to be approaching their position. Ned clearly followed the missile until it fell to earth but a short distance away. Scarcely had it touched the earth before their burrow was shaken and rocked by a mighty explosion.

Dirt fell from the roof in showers. Ned had clapped his hands to his ears as the missile fell, expecting an explosion, and thus did not suffer the painful shock that would otherwise have been felt.

Glancing from the opening he saw an immense cloud of heavy black smoke hovering all about the place where the shell had landed. An awful odor crept into the place, nearly choking the men.

Again a cry from the man on watch startled Ned. Another shell was coming! He turned to run back along the passageway,

but stumbled on the uneven floor and fell. A shout from the officer roused the boy.

Looking backward, he could see a revolver leveled in his direction, and lost no time in scrambling to his feet. Just in time he dodged around an agle in the passage. Shot after shot came tearing into the dirt at his side. Luckily the officer's aim was poor.

In a half-panic Ned raced as fast as he was able along the narrow tunnel. His one thought was to regain the open air and find his chums, who would be frantic at his long-delayed return. He had gone but a few steps until the earth seemed to rock violently. A burst of air from the rear swept the boy off his feet. His ears were deafened by a terrific blast that shook the entire surroundings.

Scrambling upward beneath the weight of dirt that had fallen, Ned with great difficulty stood upright. Strangely enough, daylight was all about him. The roof of the trench had fallen!

Glancing backward, Ned saw a yawning pit where once had been the roomful of soldiers. A heavy black cloud of smoke hung over the place.

Astounded at the narrow margin by which

he had escaped the disaster that had overtaken the men in the trench, Ned stood for an instant, unable to decide what to do. Then his training prompted him to return to lend whatever aid might be in his power to such as needed it.

Search as he might, the boy could find no indication of living men. All, seemingly, had been blown to atoms. As he was turning away from the scene, sick at heart, he brushed aside a low-growing bush. From an upper branch fell an object. It was part of a man's arm, with a revolver still clutched in the hand. Ned ran at full speed from the spot.

CHAPTER XX.

Lost Above the Lines.

Impatiently awaiting the return of their comrade, the four boys sat in the Grey Eagle. Jimmie insisted on keeping the motor running, in order that it would be warm and ready for instant flight upon Ned's return with the receipt for the message.

"It seems to take an awful long time!" fumed Jack, peering into the growth of bushes nearest the Grey Eagle. "He can't be lost!"

"Lost nothing!" exclaimed Jimmie scornfully. "You can't lose Ned Nestor! He's probably having an argument with the guys over there, who will do everything they can to delay him so their friend can win!"

"That wasn't exactly a fair thing to do, anyhow!" protested Francois. "I think it was arranged for a huge joke!"

"Joke?" queried Jimmie, bristling. "Joke? If those things are jokes, I haven't any sense of humor. That's no joke!"

"It's a mighty low sort of trick, I say!" spoke up Harry.

"That's what it is," chimed in Jimmie. "And, say, Francois," he went on, "we like you, and you're a good friend of ours, but please don't try to smooth over this Frenchman's actions. It won't go!"

"All right," replied the lad. "I don't approve of it any more than you do, but I wanted to make peace, that's all."

"Well, you just remain neutral, and it'll be all right!"

A general laugh went up at this declaration. They knew that Jimmie loved neutrality and peace, even if he had to fight to get them.

Directly the clamor of the monoplane's motors ceased. The noise had been growing louder and more distinct, but now died away entirely. Jimmie stood up in his place and peered anxiously about.

"What's going on?" he questioned. "Is he stopping?"

"I don't think so," ventured Francois. "He's just shutting off power, and will volplane down to a point where he picks up the re-

ceipt. Then he will swing upward again under power and be away!"

The boy's conjecture was, indeed, correct. The pilot of the monoplane glided swiftly down to a level barely clear of the earth. Swooping along, he caught the immense hoop on which the message had been fixed, wrenched it from its standard, and again started upward.

"There he goes!" shouted Jimmie disgustedly, as the roar of the exhaust from the French machine reached their ears. "Engine working like an Ingersoll, everything all right, clear track, nothing to do till tomorrow! Great Frozen Hot Boxes; this is something fierce!"

"Keep your head, Jimmie," advised Jack consolingly. "We've lost this race, but there may be others. Ned will return directly."

"Well, what's keeping him?" demanded Jimmie, controlling himself with an effort. "I wonder if they are reading the message before replying."

"They're a bunch of pikers!" declared Harry.

Of course, we know that Harry's application of the term to the ones in charge of the

receipt was in this case unwarranted. Ned's delay could not in any way be charged to their actions at this time.

"I'm going to run along the path a little ways and see what's keeping Ned!" declared Jimmie at length. "I know something's wrong!"

"Better stay here, Jimmie," advised Harry. "Ned wouldn't like it if you wander away from the machine even a little way."

"That's right, Jimmie," added Jack. "Ned might return here by another route than that which he followed, and you'd miss him!"

"Besides," continued Francois, "I think it is going to rain. I felt a big drop just now on my face, and it seems to be getting colder."

Glancing about, the boys agreed that a change in the weather was imminent. Their previous experiences enabled them to forecast changes with a fair degree of accuracy. Just now they could not decide what might be in store. Heavy clouds were forming on the horizon, but the sun was still shining on the Grey Eagle and its crew.

Speculating and debating on the cause of Ned's delay, the boys passed away several

minutes. Presently the suspense became unendurable to Jimmie, who provided himself with several clips of cartridges for his automatic and, declaring his intention of finding Ned, set out.

"Go careful with that smoke wagon!" called Jack.

"Guess I know how to run one of these things!" declared Jimmie. "If it's necessary, I'm going to clean house on that bunch back there! They haven't any right to hold Ned so long as this! I'm sore!"

Walking rapidly, the boy soon entered the undergrowth that hid him from sight of those in the Grey Eagle. Every instinct alert, the lad slipped silently along in the general direction taken by his comrade some time previously. He was studying the ground carefully.

At one point he stopped abruptly, examined the turf at his feet, then glanced about without raising his head. He was standing in the very spot where Ned had been halted. Following the footprints with his eyes, Jimmie detected the opening, and on further examination noticed that the aperture had been made by hands wielding tools.

"Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" gasped the boy. "There's a cave, as sure as guns are iron! Some of those fairies or pygmies or hobgoblins have gone and geezled Ned! Here's their window!"

Stepping lightly over the surface, Jimmie took great pains to leave the tracks of Ned and his captor undisturbed. Arriving at the entrance behind the clump of bushes, the boy stooped, and for some time examined carefully every mark. At length he straightened and set off in the direction of the Grey Eagle, evidently following another trail.

Directly he glanced ahead and saw, to his amazement, that his chums were in trouble. He slipped cautiously out of sight behind a friendly shrub, and crept close to the machine and its occupants.

Jack, Harry and Francois had viewed with some misgivings the departure of Jimmie upon his quest, which they considered useless.

Determined to remain at the spot where Ned had left them until his return, they settled themselves and began a conversation on many topics. The scenery attracted their attention most, and they were admiring a range

of hills to the eastward when they heard a command:

"Surrender! You will be shot!"

Surprised at the gruff voice, which they did not recognize, the boys turned instantly, to find themselves covered by two rifles held in the determined grasp of men in uniform. This, at least, was no joke!"

"What do you want?" stormed Jack indignantly. "Put down those guns! Don't you know they might go off and hurt somebody?"

"This one has already accounted for several of your countrymen!" replied one of the men with a laugh. "It is ready to do a like service for you if you do not surrender at once! Come, time is short!"

"What does a fellow have to do when he surrenders?" asked Jack. "We strive to please, but are not quite posted as to your customs!"

"Alight from that machine instantly!" commanded the other.

"Why?" questioned Jack argumentatively.

"Because I have told you! I shall shoot if you do not!"

"That's a mighty good argument, Old Scout," agreed Jack, "but we don't like your

methods. You are a little too rough in your play!"

"Play!" stormed the other, fast losing patience. "This is not play, as you shall soon learn. Come, I shall not argue!"

"Well, the nerve of some people's children!" exclaimed Harry. "Say, Buddy," he added, "we're from the United States, and we don't see how you can boss us around like that. We haven't harmed you!"

"United States!" scorned the soldier. "So said the other. All Germans come from the United States! No," he decided, shaking his head, "you must invent some other story. That is not good!"

"Do you mean to call us Germans?" Harry cried, rising. "Why, you better look out or I'll get sore! We're not Germans; we're Yankees!"

"Have your own way about it, but come out of that machine instantly!" replied the soldier, dropping his air of banter and raising his rifle.

Just as the boys were preparing to obey this command, they were startled to hear Jimmie's voice crying:

"Stay where you are, boys! And you Land-

sturm fellows, drop your guns and put up your hands! Do it quick, or something will drop!"

Chagrined at the thought of being captured by a single boy, the soldiers attempted a show of resistance. Their opinions underwent a swift change as Jimmie, seeing their intentions, fired into the ground at their feet. He was advancing, keeping the soldiers well covered.

"Take their rifles, boys," Jimmie directed. "Lay 'em away!"

Raging at this sudden reversal of affairs, the soldiers could do nothing else than meekly permit their arms to be removed.

"Now, then," went on Jimmie, "where did you put our comrade?"

"He went through the trenches with our superior," answered one.

"Where is he now?" asked Jimmie, keeping his automatic ready.

Characteristic shrugs of the shoulders was the only reply.

At that instant the boys heard a terrific screaming in the air, followed by the boom of a distant cannon. Instantly they felt the shock of a bursting shell of large proportions.

"Look, look!" cried Francois, using the French language. "It is one of those dreadful shells. Look at the awful black smoke!"

For the moment all eyes were turned in the direction indicated. It was, indeed, as Francois had said. The dreaded smoke was there.

Again they heard the scream of a shell, and this time as it exploded the tremor of the earth was greater, although the detonation was not so loud as in the case of the former shell.

"That hit into something!" declared Jimmie excitedly.

"Where are they coming from?" asked Harry. "Who's shooting?"

"Those are the dreaded German shells!" replied Francois.

For a few moments the boys stood, expecting to hear other shells. None came, however, and they were about to give their attention to the soldiers when Jimmie espied Ned's figure running toward them.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in!" he exclaimed, rushing toward his chum. "Where did you come from, Scout? Aren't you lost?"

Ned shuddered and hid his face. He was

horrified at his recent experience. In a few words he told the details.

"There's an aeroplane rising from the eastward!" cried Harry.

"I'll bet it's a Taube!" declared Jimmie. "It's bird-shaped!"

Upon seeing the flier the soldiers became panic stricken. They declared that all were in danger from bombs and darts, and begged the boys to take refuge in the trenches, where only lay safety.

"Let's wheel the Grey Eagle under those trees," suggested Ned, "and get into the trenches with them. It is safer than out here!"

No time was lost in carrying out this suggestion, and friendship having been established by Ned's safe return, all were soon at ease in the somewhat crowded quarters. Their anxiety was not lessened, however, for the German flier proceeded to pass above their position, dropping an occasional bomb. This continued until darkness, accompanied by a fog and rain, compelled him to retire to the shelter of his own lines.

Jimmie's hunger, added to the discomfort of the trench, compelled the boys to consider

a change. Finding repairs to the damaged trench possible, a detachment of soldiers had appeared. They were joined by the two with whom the lads had become so well acquainted. "Let's fly back to the aviation camp and get supper!" Jimmie proposed. "I have got another of those bad colds!"

In a short time the boys had mounted the Grey Eagle and were away from the scene. Below and all about them lay the fog. Sounds came faintly up to their ears. Suddenly a piercing scream indicated the passage of another of the giant shells. A roar told that it had landed and exploded. Ned steered away in another direction. Below them a great flash of light accompanied a terrific roar. A cannon had been fired.

"Where are we, Ned?" quavered Jimmie. "Can you tell?"

"We're right over a battery!" replied Ned, shifting the levers. "They seem to be firing and fired at! We're between two fires!"

"We're lost, that's what we are," cried Jimmie, "and no compass!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Coffee With the Kaiser.

"Lost?" was Harry's startled ejaculation. "Don't say that!"

"Why not?" inquired Jimmie, peering into the thick fog that enveloped them. "Why not say it, when it is so? We sure are lost!"

Gradually the din below them increased, as gun after gun was added to the number in action. It seemed that a general bombardment was in progress along the whole line. Ned drew the Grey Eagle to a greater height, for the sake of safety, hoping to be out of range of shells.

"Suppose we just whoop it up for a few minutes the way you're headed, and see if we can't get away from this racket!" urged Jimmie.

With a nod of consent Ned touched the throttle, sending the Grey Eagle ahead on fleet wings. The machine dashed into banks of fog so thick the boys were soon dripping wet.

"Up, up, Ned!" cried Jack. "We're into a tree!"

A quick pull at the levers sent the Grey Eagle almost straight up. The tree was cleared by a narrow margin. Ned glanced about and shook his head. He had barely saved the craft and its freight.

Slowing pace and flying low, Ned located a clearing where he determined to land. He circled easily to rest in a plowed field of perhaps two or three acres in extent, and the boys at once proceeded to find shelter under a growth of trees beside the field.

"I see a highway!" announced Jimmie in a moment. "Also, I hear hens talking. Guess I'll forage and get some eggs and things!"

The boys were surprised at Jimmie's short absence. Bearing two fowls and a hatful of eggs, he was back with little delay.

"We're lucky!" he announced. "The house is all shot up, folks gone, but hens still on the job. There's three or four cases of eggs back there, just lying around. How'll you have 'em, fried, scrambled, boiled, broiled, baked, stewed, poached, omelette, or just plain eggs?"

"Make some coffee, too, Jimmie," directed Ned, "but don't let the fire show. No telling who may be scouting around here."

"Right-o, Scout!" agreed Jimmie, in a low tone. "Jack, will you get out that can of sliced bacon and the coffee, and I'll look after the fire. Harry, there's still water in the 'Eagle's' tanks for coffee!"

Jimmie took a stick about an inch in diameter, and with his knife sharpened one end. This he thrust into the earth, after clearing away the leaves and rubbish. Stepping to the Grey Eagle he took from its place a funnel used for filling the gasoline tanks. Plugging the lower end by using his finger, Jimmie drained from one end of the fuel tanks about a quart of gasoline. This he carried to the holes and poured a pint or more into each hole. A match applied completed the stove.

Jimmie set the coffee pot over one hole and used another for frying bacon. Plenty of eggs were available, so the boys did not place a limit on anyone's appetite. Jack afterwards declared that he never tasted better coffee or eggs. The coffee was drained to the last drop.

During the progress of their meal the sound of cannonading had been continuous. No shells had struck near their position, but Ned ventured to mount a rising piece of

ground not far from their camp, in an effort to make a survey of the situation.

He reported that the fog was thinning, but was still too thick to permit of navigating the Grey Eagle. He advised getting a little rest. Gladly the tired boys availed themselves of this suggestion. Toward morning Jimmie, dreaming that he was pursued by a monster shell, woke screaming. This roused the others, but they remained sheltered by the tree.

"I hear more firing!" announced Ned. "I wonder if this is a continuation of the same battle, or is it a new one starting!"

"I'll bet it's a new one starting," replied Jack. "See that bunch of autos and men and guns out there on the highway! They're headed this way, too! Maybe we'd better move a little."

"They're going past," put in Jimmie. "They're headed west! I believe they're Germans!" added the boy in astonishment.

"I guess you're right, Jimmie!" Ned agreed. "How does it happen?"

"I know!" spoke up Harry. "We got lost and flew accidentally into German territory. We are probably now in Flanders."

"I'm hungry!" announced Jimmie pres-

ently, after the guns had passed. "I'm going back to get some more eggs!"

Directly he returned with a liberal supply of fresh eggs.

"After breakfast," remarked Jack, "I'm going to wring out my clothes and hang 'em up to dry! That fog makes things awful wet!"

"Nice clothes line handy," announced Jimmie, "see it?"

He pointed to a wire suspended not very far from the ground.

"What's that?" queried Harry. "It looks brand new. I wonder what it can be! Oh, I know!" he cried. "It's a military phone line!"

"That's nice!" Jimmie laughed. "Hello, Central! Oh, look!" he continued, "see the nice big buzz-buggy coming, and no officer near!"

All the boys turned to look down the road at an automobile tearing along at a rapid pace. It struck a hole, wrenched an axle, lurched heavily to one side and then stopped just before toppling over. Several men in the uniforms of officers jumped quickly from the machine.

One of the men at once produced from the auto a case from which he took a set of field

telephones. Stepping to the side of the road and attaching a clamp to the wire Jimmie had discovered, he pushed a pin into the ground and began a conversation. Harry touched Ned's arm.

"Get ours out, Harry," exclaimed Ned. "Maybe we can get some information. I don't know, though, whether our phone would work here!"

Although the instruments seemed to be wound to the same resistance, Ned could make out but little of the conversation.

"It is in German," he said, "and all I could get was the last part. The fellow said something about 'Uhlans,' and I know they are the light cavalry of Germany. Possibly he is sending for a troop!"

"Must be some dignitary if he can get a troop of Uhlans whenever his auto breaks down!" mused Jimmie. "Say," he continued, "that bunch out there look hungry! Suppose we ask 'em to have breakfast!"

"Go as far as you like," Ned agreed. "There are lots of eggs!"

In a moment Jimmie was racing down the road. The boys saw him give the Boy Scout salute, and then point toward their resting

place. After a short conference the entire party made their way to the spot where Jack and Harry were preparing new "stoves" and had already set a pot of coffee boiling. Another can of bacon was opened to supplement the chicken stew which Jimmie had been preparing.

"Help yourselves, gentleman!" Jimmie cried hospitably.

They accordingly fell to with vigor. It was noticed that the officer who seemed to be in command of the party, a tall man of commanding presence, whose well-knit frame showed years of training, did not seat himself, but remained on his feet. His stern yet kindly face bore evidence of days and nights of anxiety. The keen eyes seemed to take in every detail. The boys at once felt a liking for this man.

After all had been supplied with a plateful of bacon and eggs and stewed chicken, with an aluminum cup full of coffee, Ned addressed the leader, in an effort to be of assistance in their trouble.

"You have had a bad accident to your machine," he said.

"Yes," was the reply, "we shall be delayed a short time."

"We have a very good aeroplane there," volunteered the lad, pointing toward the Grey Eagle, "and if you care to accept, I can carry two of you to your destination, provided it be not too far."

"Thank you for your courtesy," replied the officer, "but we are traveling in a party, and do not wish to separate. By the way," he continued, "how does it happen that you are here?"

Feeling that he could trust the kindly face before him, Ned briefly recounted the main incidents leading up to their present position.

"What is your present plan?" asked the officer.

"I wish to get to Berlin as quickly as possible," Ned replied eagerly. "I shall swear out a warrant for The Rat, have him arrested and get extradition papers out and have him taken back to the United States."

"And what is his offense?" asked the officer.

"He has stolen some plans of United States fortifications."

"Ah, and he is trying to dispose of them to Germany?"

"I fear that is his intention. I am almost at a loss to know how to prevent his doing so. Perhaps I can get to see the Kaiser. I understand he is very powerful, and is also friendly to the United States. He might be able to help me have this fellow arrested."

"No doubt the Kaiser will be delighted to assist you in your most worthy endeavor. I may be in Berlin shortly, and if I see the Kaiser I will speak to him about your matter. We appreciate your courtesy, and shall hope to reciprocate. The morning is very chill!" he concluded, as if the subject were closed. Turning away he buttoned his great coat.

"Here comes a monoplane!" announced Jimmie, who had been scanning the morning sky, as well as keeping a sharp lookout all around.

"And what's more important, here comes a troop of cavalry," Harry rejoined, looking down the road. "They've got a lot of empty saddles! I wonder if they have been in an engagement!"

"Those are for us, I believe," an officer said, preparing to depart.

At this moment a roar from the woods behind the party told of the planting of one of

the guns which had so recently passed. Another and yet another caused the earth to tremble. At regular intervals the cannon were fired almost as rapidly as they could be loaded.

Amidst the frightful din the boys saw the monoplane descend not far from their camp, but separated by a strip of woods. Their attention was diverted for the moment by the arrival of the group of horsemen.

Shaking hands with all five boys, the officer in command turned. A quick salute was exchanged, and the boys saw another officer assist his superior to mount. The horse was a magnificent animal and restless.

"Look there!" whispered Jimmie into Ned's ear. "See the boob getting up on the wrong side! He isn't much of an army officer!"

Ned's smile as he turned back toward the fire was not observed by Jimmie, who at once began to explain to his comrades how the man had gotten onto his horse from the right, or "off," side, when he should have mounted from the left, or "near," side, raising his left foot first.

The joke was hugely enjoyed until Ned ex-

plained that he understood that to be the only way a certain man could mount a horse.

"And who is that man, if you please?" Jimmie asked.

"The man we have just entertained," answered Ned, "the Kaiser!"

"Well, Great Frozen Hot Boxes!" shouted Jimmie. "Now that you mention it, I can see how much he resembles his pictures. Well, what do you know about our frying bacon and eggs and making coffee for him?"

Instantly all was confusion about the little camp. All the boys began talking at once, unmindful of the fact that cannon were booming but a short distance away, and that the enemy might reply at any moment.

Jimmie had already gathered and cared for the dishes, and as he came up to the party after a trip to the Grey Eagle, he seemed to be aware of their danger. Breaking into the conversation he said:

"Ned, we'd better be getting out of here! These Germans are probably shelling a French battery, and if the Frenchmen reply, or should make a charge to get these fellows, we'd be in a mighty bad place!"

"Jimmie, you're right!" decided Ned. "This

locality is getting rather warm for fellows about our size! I'm ready to go!"

As the boys turned to take a last look at their camping spot under the trees which had afforded them protection, a shell came screaming through the air. Evidently the Frenchmen were getting the range of the German guns. The shell landed in the top of the big tree and exploded, covering the boys beneath with a shower of limbs and splinters.

"Oh, look!" cried Jimmie, pointing across the field toward the Grey Eagle. "See that fellow by the plane! Hold on, there, you!"

A man beside the machine seemed to be lighting a fuse. He laid a package on the engine, glanced at Jimmie running with drawn automatic, then bounded away through the trees with Jimmie in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXII.

Thrown From the Clouds.

"That's The Rat!" shrilled Jack. "He's trying to blow up the Grey Eagle! That was he in the monoplane! Hurry! Hurry!"

At once the lad dashed toward the Grey Eagle. Without stopping to reckon the consequences, he darted for the package, seized it, with its still sputtering fuse, and started to carry it away from the aeroplane.

Harry, who had been close behind his chum, reached Jack's side in an instant with drawn knife in hand. It required only a moment's time to cut the fuse close to the bundle. A last spurt of flame showed that the effort had been successful. Both boys realized their narrow escape.

"What shall we do with this stuff, Ned?" asked Jack shakily.

"Put it on the soft ground at the far side of the clearing!" Ned answered. "But I'm worrying about Jimmie. He may get into trouble out there all alone. Can you follow and learn where he has gone?"

"I don't know about that!" Jack hesitated. "It would be hard work and, besides, he will come back all right! He won't stay long!"

"He won't be back right away if The Rat succeeds in giving him the worst of it!" declared Harry anxiously. "I'll go find him!"

"Thank you, Harry," Ned said gratefully. "We can't afford to lose Jimmie, and I'm afraid The Rat is getting desperate!"

Harry started for the spot where his chum had disappeared. He had not proceeded far when the boys heard the roar of the monoplane's engine. In an instant the machine rose in plain view above the trees.

"There he is!" Francois cried. "There's Jimmie on the machine!"

It was true. Jimmie appeared on the chassis of the monoplane, and seemed to be attempting to climb into the body of the craft. The boys saw him lean far out to peer around the curved side of the body. As the machine rose the pilot described an immense circle, evidently trying to get clear of the surrounding trees before attempting to lay a course in any direction. With the added burden of Jimmie's shifting weight he seemed to have trouble in keeping the machine steadied.

Two shots in quick succession were heard. Jimmie and The Rat were exchanging compliments. Neither had scored.

The machine was now swinging back toward the clearing, where the boys stood lost in amazement at the predicament of their chum.

Harry, who was nearest the Grey Eagle, clambered aboard and unshipped the magazine rifle Jimmie had used early the day before. However, he could get no opportunity to shoot without endangering their chum.

"He's coming right over us!" cried Jack in an excited tone.

"Sure! He's circling around, trying to get high enough to clear these big trees!" answered Ned. "But how can we help Jimmie?"

"Take a shot at the pilot, Harry!" advised Jack eagerly.

"Don't shoot, Harry!" cautioned Ned. "You might hit The Wolf!"

Nearer swept the aeroplane and its warring passengers. Jimmie and The Rat continued to exchange shots, but the conditions were unfavorable to accurate marksmanship. Suddenly the machine turned upward.

Horrified, the boys stood in their places, un-

able to move. Jimmie seemed to lose his grip on the framework. He dropped from the aeroplane.

Expecting to find the lad badly mangled, Ned dashed away in the direction of Jimmie's probable landing place. Jack followed at a rapid pace. Harry raised the rifle and sent shot after shot in the direction of the retreating craft with vindictiveness. The clamor of the motor suddenly ceased. Evidently a bullet had reached a vital part of the machinery. Realizing his danger, the pilot began volplaning down in an extreme effort to make a safe landing clear of the trees.

Harry ran in the direction taken by Ned, intending to lend his aid in rendering what assistance he might to Jimmie. A shell from some distant gun fell a short distance in front of him and burst, sending into the air a shower of dirt. Staggered and stunned, the boy, determined to do his best, blundered ahead. A bullet whizzed past, but he pressed on.

An attacking party, sent forward under protection of the French guns, was evidently trying to rout the battery recently planted by the Germans who had passed the boys at

breakfast. Other bullets came singing through the trees. Frantic with fear for the safety of himself and his comrades, but determined to rescue Jimmie if possible, the boy went on.

Directly he was overjoyed to see Ned and Harry returning. His heart sank, however, when he observed that Ned was carrying Jimmie's form. Lying across Ned's shoulder, his left leg thrown forward and encircled by Ned's left arm, the hand of which clutched the boy's left wrist, Jimmie lay limp and helpless. His eyes were closed, and his head rolled from side to side with every movement of Ned's body.

"Is he——?" Harry did not dare to say the dreaded word.

"Don't know yet," gasped Jack, beside the leader and his burden.

"Where did you find him? What is that blood?" asked Francois.

"He's bleeding at the nose," replied Jack, answering the latter question first. "As he fell, he struck the top of a small tree and bent it until it broke. Then he fell onto the roof of a covered trench or pit and caved that in. We pulled him out of a mess of broken poles

and dirt. They are charging this position and shooting, so we didn't dare stop out there to examine him. Get some water and open the medicine chest!"

Ned staggered to the edge of the clearing nearest the Grey Eagle and laid the boy's limp form on the turf. Harry had dashed ahead and now ran up with the medicine chest and a bucket of water.

Nearly exhausted with his violent exertions, Ned at once set about measures to revive the boy, if possible. Both the other lads contributed their best efforts to the same end. In a short time they were rewarded by seeing their chum's eyelids twitch. A gasp and shake of the head told them that Jimmie still lived. Harry threw his hat into the air.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Can't kill off a Wolf so easy as that!"

"Jimmie," called Ned, "are you hurt? Can you speak?"

To both questions Jimmie only nodded his head.

"Where are you hurt most, Jimmie? Speak to me if you can!"

"All over!" was the scarcely audible reply. "Great——"

"——Frozen Hot Boxes!" Ned supplied the balance of Jimmie's newest pet expression, and smiled as he observed the grin on the lad's face.

In a moment Harry and Jack were manipulating Jimmie's limbs to discover whether he had suffered a fracture. Then they rolled him over and began to feel cautiously of his ribs and spine.

"Just a case of having the wind knocked out of him!" announced Jack gleefully, as the boys rolled their comrade onto his back again.

"I'm going to sign the pledge!" came Jimmie's faint voice. "That was a drop too much!" he added, with a forced grin at his friends.

"Stop it, Jimmie!" commanded Ned. "That was too serious!"

"Did you get him?" inquired the prostrate lad.

With a start the boys remembered The Rat. They had seen the monoplane descending, but in the excitement had forgotten him. Forgotten, too, had been the danger in which they were now placed. With one accord they

scrambled to their feet and began to look about.

"I move we get out of here as quickly as possible," voted Jack.

"You're right!" Ned assented eagerly. "Let's carry Jimmie to the machine, and be on our way. He will need a little help, I guess!"

Supported between Harry and Jack, with Ned carrying the rifle, Jimmie was helped back to the Grey Eagle. The boys began preparing for a quick departure from the spot to one of greater safety.

"What shall we do with the dynamite?" anxiously inquired Jack.

"Explode it!" suggested Jimmie. "With all this other noise going on, nobody will notice it. They'll think it's only another shell!"

The package still lay where it had been deposited. Harry picked up the rifle, intending to fire at the dangerous stuff in an effort to explode it and thus remove the danger of its bringing harm to anyone.

His first shot went a trifle high. The next was sent with truer aim, and a terrific roar greeted the boys. Just as the blast reverber-

ated through the clearing several horsemen dashed into view from the highway.

One in the lead shouted an order to his companions, as he pointed toward the group of boys. Instantly the others dashed forward across the clearing. The boys were quickly surrounded by the horsemen, who threatened them with drawn revolvers. Harry slipped the rifle into its resting place.

The leader was shouting questions and orders in German.

Ned shook his head and held up his hand. He took a step forward.

"I cannot understand you," he said. "Can you speak English?"

"Not very well," answered the officer, "but good enough to tell you to surrender. Escape is impossible. You must come with us!"

"What is the charge?" queried Ned. "What have we done?"

The officer laughed loudly. Apparently the joke was a huge one.

"Charge?" he repeated incredulously. "Do you not know that war is in progress, and it is not necessary to have charge or warrant? You are prisoners because we carry our warrants in these," indicating his revolver. "You

must either come with us or be shot. Which shall it be?"

"We surrender!" stated Ned hopelessly. "Where do we go?"

"March along with us. We shall ride slowly."

"But our comrade here has just suffered a bad fall!" Ned protested. "He cannot walk far in his present condition!"

"So?" commented the officer, with a quick glance at Jimmie. "Yes, he is evidently weakened, and is but a boy. We must provide assistance for him. You other four lads can walk, however, for a short distance."

An order was spoken in a low tone to two of the cavalrymen, who at once set off at a sharp gallop. The others prepared to surround the lads to prevent escape, while the officer himself offered Jimmie a ride at the rear of his own saddle. The horse was a magnificent bay, and Jimmie's heart bounded with pride at the thought of riding with the officer.

Refusing to answer Ned's further questions, and deigning no explanation in regard to the care of the Grey Eagle, the officer rode silently among his men. Not far from the place the boys noticed the two troopers re-

turning with four led horses saddled and bridled.

"There," offered their captor. "You may mount and ride!"

"Get up on the 'off' side, Ned," suggested Jimmie with a grin. "Then he may think you are related to the Kaiser, like I am!"

"But the hair?" questioned the officer. He could not see the grimace made by the boy at his back, but laughed loudly at his own joke.

Riding at a rapid pace that kept the boys, and especially Francois, bobbing about at a great rate, the little party soon left the whizzing of bullets and sharp scream of shells a goodly distance in the rear. They approached a little valley through which ran a winding stream.

"I see a castle just ahead!" cried Jimmie.

"Yes, there are we going!" replied the officer. "There is headquarters where we take all distinguished prisoners, especially relatives of the Kaiser. And others who have red hair," he added with a chuckle.

Turning in at a great gate, flanked on either side by immense stone posts, the party clattered up the path to the very castle itself. At the entrance they were halted by a sentry,

who permitted them to pass through after receiving an answer to his challenge.

The boys gazed with frank curiosity at the scenes about them. It seemed like a page clipped from a story book. There they recognized the many features about which they had read but scarcely believed existed.

Jimmie was helped down from his position, while the other boys dismounted without assistance. For a few moments they found walking very difficult, owing to the strange experience of riding horseback.

"I wish they had couches for travelers!" announced Jimmie. "I feel rather tired somehow! This has been a hard day!"

Ned was at once overtaken with remorse at his forgetfulness of Jimmie's shaken condition. He was quickly busy with arrangements for his chum's comfort. The other lads gathered about, eager to help.

"I say, officer," Ned called out, "this boy needs rest."

"And he shall have it!" a man at Ned's elbow spoke.

The lad was astonished to see one of the men who had breakfasted with them, and who appeared to be the Kaiser's chief aide.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Mysterious Door.

"How do you do!" greeted Ned, pleased to recognize their friend. He stepped forward and extended his hand, which the other grasped firmly.

"Your young friend?" queried the other. "Is he hurt badly?"

In a few words, Ned outlined the circumstances following the breakfast. He told of Jimmie's fall from the low-flying monoplane, of his striking a small tree which broke the force of his fall, and of his crashing through the roofed-over trench. The rest of the story was supplied by their captor, who seemed greatly interested in Jimmie's welfare.

"Bring him inside," commanded the officer. "We will provide comforts for him without delay, although this is far from being a hospital."

"I can walk all right," protested Jimmie. "I'm only shaken up and tired out! Ned's system of 'setting up' exercises has kept us as hard as nails, and aside from being shaken to pieces, I'm all right!"

Smiling at the exhibition of grit, the officer helped Jimmie to his feet and then guided him through a nearby door. The little party was conducted to what had evidently been a luxurious bed chamber in the rambling building, which was half chateau, half castle.

Here stood a giant four poster bed with a great canopy, and into this Jimmie was tumbled after his shoes had been pulled off by his chums.

"Now, you may lie there and sleep if you like," announced the officer. "I will have some food brought to you directly." Then, turning to Ned, he continued: "It is necessary, under the circumstances, to detain your party for a time. We are informed that you are acting as spies in the interest of our enemy, and until we can investigate that report, we shall be required to maintain a surveillance. You will make it easy?"

"Certainly, we will, sir!" replied Ned, grateful for the assistance to his chum. "We are only anxious to make sure that the man about whom we spoke this morning is not allowed to carry out his intention."

A meaning smile greeted this remark. The officer went on:

"Do not trouble your mind in that direction. I think I am safe in saying that Germany does not desire war with your country, and certainly does not care to make war upon young men of your standing."

"Thank you again!" Ned exclaimed. "You are very kind!"

"I will leave you now for a time," stated the officer. "Should you need anything, you may communicate your wishes to the man just outside the door. I have much work to do, and the time passes rapidly. It is already well past noon. I will see you again presently."

As soon as the officer had departed Ned glanced out into the passageway. A soldier in uniform stood not far away. At Ned's appearance he first brought his rifle into position, then upon seeing the lad he stepped forward inquiringly. Ned gave the Boy Scout salute, shook his head and withdrew again into the apartment. Jimmie had dropped asleep.

"Gritty little rascal," commented Jack, indicating with a nod the sleeping figure. "He got an awful bump, but won't admit it."

"Jimmie's chock full of grit and good sense

and loyalty and lots of other fine qualities!" declared Ned, tenderly watching the sleeping lad.

"Don't know what we'd do without him!" Harry almost choked. "I wish there were a lot more just like him, red hair and all," he ended with a laugh that spoke eloquently of his affection for The Wolf.

Truth to tell, the boys had been far more alarmed at Jimmie's recent danger than any of them were willing to admit.

"Here comes the dinner!" announced Francois in a tone of relief.

"Hurrah for the pieman!" criek Jack, advancing to meet a man bearing a huge tray piled high with dishes. "I'm hungry enough to eat a bear!"

"What's that about a bear?" asked Jimmie, attempting to rise.

"Go to sleep, Jimmie!" ordered Harry. "Nothing is going on that you'd be interested in at all. We're only going to have dinner!"

"All right, I'll go to sleep—after dinner!" declared the lad.

No time was lost by the five hungry boys in attacking the food, which, though simple, was plentiful and well cooked. As they ate

they discussed the situation in general and their own position particularly.

"This looks like it had been a pretty fine place before——" said Jimmie, glancing about the apartment. "But they've knocked it about some!"

"Francois," asked Ned, "do you know the country hereabouts well enough to tell us what place this is? It looks like an old establishment."

"No, I do not know the place," replied Francois. "It is in Flanders and, therefore, I have not learned of it. I have not seen all in France yet," the boy ended, with a smile. "To me this is just a castle."

"It belongs to the Duke de Swell Elegant Upper Crust!" answered Jimmie, promptly. His disrespect for titles at least had suffered no harm from his tumble out of the sky earlier in the day. "He's a half brother," he continued, "to the Baron von Cheap Skate. They ran the livery stable here!"

Laughingly the boys greeted this sally. Francois asked:

"And where are the Duke and Baron, now that the Germans are here?"

"They are down in the feather foundry

shooing geese," declared Jimmie, gravely. "They are working for Walker and Doolittle."

"Hark! I hear singing," said Francois. "I do not know the song."

"That's not strange," returned Jimmie. "That's 'Die Wacht Am Rhine,' and you're not supposed to recognize that, you know!"

"How inspiring and yet how awful it is!" whispered Francois. "It makes me feel as if I wanted to go out and do something real big."

"Let's go out and listen to it," suggested Harry. "They have some good voices in that bunch. I like that singing."

Opening the door the boys stepped quietly out into the corridor. From their right came the sounds of music and laughter. Stepping closer the boys peered through hanging portieres and saw a great room full of soldiers. Some were seated at small tables playing cards, others lay stretched on the floor at full length in a row, while others walked about watching the card playing. All seemed at ease after hard work, for here and there one had removed the heavy hobnailed boots, while helmets and service caps were deposited on a convenient rack. A stack of rifles in one cor-

ner spoke grimly of the business which had been temporarily laid aside while the soldiers rested. At a piano an officer was seated.

While he played with no small degree of skill a group gathered about him and sang with excellent voices. As the "Wacht Am Rhine" was finished a grand tenor voice started an encore, "Silent Night." Bursts of applause greeted his song and urged him to continue. In the German tongue, "Sing Me to Sleep" sounded strangely sweet to the listening boys.

As the song ended, the pianist struck a few chords of a livelier tune, and Jimmie unconsciously whistled "Oh Where, Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?" So interested were his companions that they lifted their voices and sang, unmindful of the roomful of soldiers. Quickly the man at the piano accompanied them. One by one the soldiers joined in until the entire roomful were roaring out the words.

Laughingly the boys were seized and thrust through the curtains. Greeted by cheers and exclamations from the group, they became embarrassed and begged to be excused, but the soldiers, having found some new object

of interest, would not let them go. They insisted on having more songs.

"We can't sing, really we can't!" protested Ned.

"Ah, you speak English?" asked the pianist. "Sing us an English song, if you please. We would like to hear one."

"We are from the United States," Ned said unconsciously squaring his shoulders. "We do not know any real English songs at all."

"So?" inquiringly the officer commented, drawing out the word very long. "Then perhaps you will sing us one of the songs of that country. I have traveled in your country and have heard many songs there. Try this!"

He struck a few chords of "Dixie" and at once the boys began. As the four fresh young voices filled the room with the tune so familiar to all Americans, their audience listened appreciatively, bursting into applause at its conclusion. Others followed, but the boys were fairly delighted when the player started "The Star Spangled Banner."

Many of the soldiers were familiar with the tune and while they did not know the

words, they listened eagerly as the boys sang.

"Thank you," the pianist said as the boys concluded. "We have enjoyed your effort very much. Will you not remain here?"

"I believe we would be more model prisoners if we stayed in our room, thank you," answered Ned. "We are under arrest, you know!"

Laughingly the officer agreed to excuse them under the circumstances and again complimenting them on their vocal efforts and on their model conduct as prisoners, he permitted them to return to their room.

Jimmie again sought the comfort of the great bed, declaring that he had not slept in a real bed in ages and this was so good he was afraid it would not last. The other boys began an inspection of the place.

"Hello!" cried Harry presently. "Here's a piece of wire. Now I wonder what they were doing with such a thing in a place like this!"

"Let me have it, please," requested Jack. "I've found a hole in the wall and I want to poke something into it. It looks inviting!"

Harry brought the piece of wire to Jack

and watched him as he investigated the interior of a curious hole.

"Well, what do you think of this?" he shouted in a moment. "Here's the mate to your key-hole, Jack. It looks just like that one!"

"Maybe it is a key-hole," Jack responded. "Try to pick it!"

The two holes were a short three feet apart and the wire was more than five feet long. Harry, therefore seized the free end and without disturbing Jack began prodding about in the hole he had discovered. Directly a low rumbling was heard coming as it seemed from the wall. The boys looked up startled. As Jack withdrew the end of the wire he noticed a flash of fire from the interior of the key-hole at which he had worked.

"Hello, boys!" he cried. "I struck fire here just now!"

"What are you two boys trying to do?" inquired Ned approaching.

"Just getting some Fourth of July here, that's all," replied Jack.

"Try it again," Ned suggested. "Let me see, too."

"You do it just like this," directed Jack. "Harry had the end of the wire in that hole over there and I had the other end in this hole. Just as I pulled the wire out of this hole when we heard a noise, I saw fire flash and heard a little snapping or crackling sound!"

"Try it again," urged Ned. "Keep the wire in both holes!"

In a moment the boys had followed out Ned's instructions and all were startled to hear again the low rumbling, grinding noise.

"Keep your wires in place!" Ned whispered. "Something's coming off here that isn't on the program! Oh, look there! Look! Look!"

As he spoke Ned pointed to a section of the wall. It was slowly swinging outward from the room, revealing a doorway. A damp, musty odor came from the opening. Beyond all was pitch blackness.

The swinging section traveled easily backward until the doorway stood wide open. A snap was heard. For a moment the slight whirring noise continued, then the door slowly swung into place again.

"Well, of all things!" gasped Jimmie, sitting up in bed.

"I see it!" cried Ned. "When the door is opened and that snap comes, the wire should be taken away. The wire, you see, forms a circuit and a concealed motor swings the door. I believe it will stay open if you take the wire away when it snaps. Try it again, boys!" he urged.

Again the wire was inserted in the holes. Again the door swung open and again the snap was heard. Quickly motioning to the boys to break the circuit, Ned was delighted to notice the whirring noise stop.

"Where are your searchlights, boys?" he asked. "Jimmie, have you still got your automatic handy? They didn't take it away, I hope."

"I dropped it when I fell from the Rat's aeroplane," confessed Jimmie. "I couldn't hang onto it all the way. Why didn't you pick it up?"

"We were busy," replied Ned in suppressed excitement. "Anybody else got a gun? I have mine and also have a searchlight."

"Here's mine," announced Jack, producing the weapon.

"And mine," echoed Harry, bringing forth his own automatic.

"Come on, then, boys," Ned invited, "but go slow and keep quite!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Under the Castle.

"Wait a minute, let me get my shoes on!" protested Jimmie.

"Aw, never mind your shoes!" urged Jack. "We can't wait!"

"Better let Jimmie put on his shoes," agreed Ned. "We won't want to leave anything here. Let's take all our belongings!"

"Why, where are you going, Ned?" asked Jimmie busy with the lacings of his shoes. "Aren't you coming back here?"

"Not if my suspicions are correct!" replied Ned.

"What! Going to get out and make for the Grey Eagle and hike out for Berlin?" questioned the lad incredulously.

"That's just what I plan on doing! You see, it's like this," explained Ned. "As we came up here I noticed that this rambling old building seems to have been built at different periods. Part is in good repair, but part has almost fallen down. The Germans in shelling the place added to the dilapidated condition

of the older section. On the north side a large portion of the older structure is in ruins."

"I see," interrupted Jimmie. "And when this secret door opened up, you figured that we could go down into the basement and find a passageway leading to the ruined old part that has been knocked to pieces. Then if there's a hole between the two we may be able to crawl out into daylight and be on our way before these fellows get wise to the game."

"Exactly," agreed Ned. "Now let's go carefully and keep quiet. There's no knowing whether we shall get out or not, but there's no need of disturbing these fellows in either case. Get your searchlights ready."

"But, Ned," protested Jack, "didn't this officer say he'd do all he could for us? Don't you think he'll keep his word?"

"It is not his disposition I question," Ned replied, "so much as his ability. I don't know how much influence he has."

"Guess you're right," put in Jimmie. "Let's be on our way, and get back to the little old Grey Eagle. This bed's fine, but I'd prefer sleeping on the ground under our own airship to being here."

Carefully throwing the rays of their

searchlights on the floor of the passageway the boys silently stepped through the small door which had been found by such a peculiar accident.

After entering the passage Ned turned to examine the mechanism that operated the section of wall, and without any difficulty discovered what he sought. After a moment's careful scrutiny the lad touched a part of the apparatus and was highly pleased to notice the door swing back into place. Not a sound except the slight humming of the motor accompanied the operation. The device worked perfectly.

"Now, how can we get out again in case we have to come back?" questioned Harry uneasily. "You've got us in here for keeps!"

"That's easy," declared Ned confidently. "All that is necessary is to touch the lever completing the circuit and the motor operates. It doesn't make any difference whether the circuit is completed from the room or from this passageway. The motor operates when the circuit is closed."

"Where does the juice come from?" asked Jimmie, frankly puzzled. "They can't run motors and things without electricity!"

"Maybe the fellow that lived here had a private plant!"

"Maybe he did, but what keeps it running now that he's gone?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Let's not worry about that!"

Cautiously proceeding along the passageway a short distance, the boys came to a flight of rude stairs cut into the wall. There was but little room on the narrow steps, and if they had not been guided by the flame from their electric torches they must have suffered a fall.

Beyond the stairs lay a black opening from which came a damp, musty odor. Jimmie sniffed distrustfully and shook his head.

"Come back, Ned," he urged. "You're going to the slaughter house where the old Duke kept pigs and things!"

"No, don't go back yet!" protested Jack. "Let's push on and see what there is ahead. Maybe Ned's conjecture is correct!"

Without further parley Ned took a few steps along the passage until he came to a turn. Here he paused to wait for his companions.

"Look here, boys," he announced. "This

passage splits. One goes straight ahead and the other turns to the left. I fancy that one runs back toward the rising ground at the rear of the castle."

"Then we don't want to take that," decided Harry.

"If we go straight ahead," Ned continued, "I figure that we shall come out near the wrecked portion of the building."

"Straight on, then," spoke up Jack, and as this seemed to be the decision of all, Ned turned to proceed.

A tremendous splash mingled with a choking cry from the leader. Ned was floundering about in water, throwing showers of spray over his companions, who came crowding forward, all excitement.

"What's the matter, Ned?" cried Jack. "Do you need help?"

As he spoke he turned the shaft of light from his electric toward his chum, revealing the lad dripping wet, standing in water a little more than knee deep. His hat and torch were gone.

"Come out of that!" commanded Jimmie, laughing.

"Guess I will, thank you," replied Ned. "I

failed to see that water until I was in it. The rock is so black and the water runs so smoothly I neither saw nor heard it."

Examination revealed a stream of water issuing from the tunnel to the left and flowing along the one in which they now found themselves. At one side a narrow shelf afforded foothold.

After securing Ned's searchlight which, owing to its waterproof covering, was not damaged, the boys proceeded more cautiously.

In a short time they found the passage partly blocked by huge masses of stone, evidently the remains of masonry dislodged by the invaders' shells. A faint odor of powder clung to the place.

"Here's where the opening to the old portion of the castle was located, or I'm no good guesser!" ventured Jimmie.

Although careful search was made for an opening none was discovered, and the party continued along the tunnel-like place. Directly Ned paused and held out a warning hand, stopping the advance.

"I heard a noise," he explained, "and could not make out what it might be. Can any of you tell what that noise is?"

Listening carefully, the boys distinctly heard a whirring rumble, but could not determine its cause nor what it indicated.

"Oh, I've got it!" gleefully announced Jimmie directly. "The Duke de Wun Lung had nothing else to do, so he installed his own power plant! This stream of water comes from a spring in the hill back there somewhere, and the old chap just led it along here. It runs through a water wheel, and the waste water runs out a nice little hole in the cellar wall! Pity he didn't put in a ram and have water in the house!"

"I believe you're right, Jimmie!" agreed Ned. "Let's see!"

Following the passage a short distance, the boys discovered that Jimmie's guess had been correct. A complete apparatus was found, operated by the power of the stream flowing through the tunnel.

"But that doesn't help us any," Harry protested. "There is no opening to the outside world except for the water!"

"Let's go along back and look over the walls more carefully," offered Francois. "Maybe we overlooked an opening in the hurry!"

Accordingly the boys slowly retraced their

steps, examining every inch of the walls. Shortly after passing the place where Ned had fallen into the current of water, Jimmie, who had been in the lead, turned back with a muffled hiss. He snapped the switch on his searchlight.

"What is it, Jimmie?" queried Jack, following the leader.

"I see a light in the passage!" replied Jimmie. "It flickers like a candle light and seems to be dodging about.

"Maybe it's the Duke's private ghost!" whispered Jack with a grin.

"Hush!" hissed Jimmie. "Cut out that nonsense!"

Proceeding cautiously, the boys indeed saw a faint reflection on the side wall. In a moment they heard voices.

The light came from a small opening about shoulder high. Through this opening also came the sound of conversation. In an instant Jimmie was peering through the hole. He dropped back shaking with excitement.

"Guess who the ghosts are!" he gritted in a whisper. "You'd never believe it! The Rat and our old friend Hungry are in there!"

Astonished, the boys crept carefully to the

opening to peer through and to listen. It was as Jimmie had said. The Rat and the man who had followed the boys in New York were standing near the middle of a small apartment. On the floor sputtered and flickered a candle.

As the boys gathered about the opening The Rat was speaking.

"——And so," the boys heard, "I settled for the red head. No person could survive a fall like that. But they got us after all, by shooting into the machinery. We had to land. Then the soldiers got me and brought me here. I'm mighty glad you happened to show up!"

"Yes," replied the one whom the boys had named "Hungry," "I felt you'd want me. After landing at Antwerp I made good time, but I was surprised when they nipped me and put me in here with you!"

"Now," continued The Rat, "they're waiting the arrival of some high officer, so they can have a trial. The boys will get theirs. Maybe I'll be searched, and I don't want them to find this package."

As he spoke he drew from its place of concealment at his waist a flat package about the size of a long business envelope.

"What I want you to do is to carry this for me until after the examination is over," The Rat went on. "I think you'd better let me hang it down your back. It will be out of the way there!"

Intently the boys watched the adjustment of the flat package. Ned greedily eyed every movement, with fingers itching to get possession of the parcel. However, he knew that the opening through which they peered was too small for him to negotiate, and it was out of the question to expect The Rat to hand him the envelope. Again The Rat spoke:

"Now, if my story goes with this new man, and they hold the boys and let us go, we'll be all right. If, however, they decide to let the boys go and hold us, I'll have this dynamite handy in my pocket," here he indicated his coat pocket, which bulged suspiciously, "and at a favorable moment I'll throw it. If I can get Ned Nestor, so much the better. The red head is out of the way, and that'll settle the two who are most dangerous. In the excitement, we'll slip through the crowd."

"Good scheme!" agreed Hungry. "And you say your pilot is at work repairing the damage to the machine?"

"He claimed that he would be able to repair it in an hour. He will wait for me at the spot I described to you. I rely upon him!"

"And then we'll be off! There's a market for the plans?"

"I should say there is!" declared The Rat. "Three different governments are dickering for them right now! We'll make our pile on this!"

"When is this officer expected to arrive?"

"Any minute now. He's late, as it is. Now, don't give yourself away! Just stick close to me and remember the arrangements!"

Jimmie tugged at Ned's sleeve. Turning away from the opening, the boys returned quickly toward the room in which they had been placed for rest and safe keeping. Ned easily found the lever to operate their secret door and the lads passed again into the chamber.

As Jack closed the door with the short length of wire, Jimmie said:

"Well, you see, boys, I'm a dead one! Won't The Rat be shocked?"

"Yes, and I'm about the same!" replied Ned soberly. "That fellow certainly is a rascal. He's planning on dynamiting me!"

"No, he isn't," protested Jimmie. "He's planning on a fiasco or my dream book is wrong. Remember your motto, Scout, and 'Be Prepared'! We'll give him a mighty big surprise when the time comes!"

"Thank you, Jimmie," replied Ned, smiling faintly.

A soldier was rapping on the door.

"The young gentlemen are wanted by the court," he announced.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Musketeer's Mistake.

At the western side of the castle, close against its massive wall, a great carved chair from the drawing room had been placed. In it was seated an officer examining a pile of papers placed on a small table by his side. About him were grouped several officers and an orderly.

Lighted by the rays of the setting sun, the towers and embrasures of the old castle, with clinging ivy hiding the rough stones, presented a beautiful picture to the lads as they stepped out that afternoon to meet the officer who would inquire into their case and decide their fate.

The great lawn, dotted here and there with clumps of shrubs, was to all appearances deserted save only for the group beside the wall. Because of the peculiar features of the case, it had been brought to the notice of the officer who had been on his way to the firing line, where his presence was required. He had consented to pause at the castle for a short time to consider the case.

As the boys, escorted by the soldier, approached the group the officer rose, and with a smile extended his hand to Ned.

"I'm glad to meet you again so quickly," he said. "I enjoyed my breakfast immensely," he added. "You have most excellent cooks!"

"Thank you," answered Ned, recognizing him as another of their early morning guests. "We Boy Scouts try to prove capable in that line."

"I can testify to your ability in that direction," answered the officer, turning to the one in charge of the castle. "You, also, can bear testimony in the cook's favor, can you not?"

"Gladly!" replied the other. "I am delighted to see the practical results of the Boy Scout training. It possesses much merit!"

"I agree with you," said the first speaker. "But here come the prisoners. Let us get this disagreeable business finished!"

Ned's hands clenched and his face turned a shade paler as he observed the little group which now approached. He drew his comrades back a step until they were almost against the massive walls of the castle.

"Boys," he whispered, "you better stand a

little farther to one side. If anything should happen, you know, it might——"

"Shut up!" snapped Jimmie. "We didn't come all this way to back out now. If he starts anything, I'll plug him!"

Further conversation was impossible, for the officer held up a warning hand to the boys. He turned to greet the newcomers.

Between two heavily armed soldiers marched The Rat and Hungry, who approached the place with vindictive glances at the boys. The Rat's surprise at seeing Jimmie well and grinning had turned to rage.

Scarcely acknowledging the pleasant greeting of the officer, The Rat at once launched into a long story, using the German tongue. Ned could not follow the speech, but judged from the gestures and glances in their direction that the man was accusing the boys of some misdemeanor.

"You may speak English," directed the officer, "for the benefit of our young friends here who do not understand your present language."

"You have understood what I have just told you," sulked The Rat.

"Your statement will be accepted for what

it is worth," was the reply. "Just now we are inquiring with special regard to your presence here. It has been stated that you came in an airship from France, that you landed near our lines, and that you have on your person certain documents of interest to this country. All this, if true, would indicate that you are here as a spy in the interest of France. Also, if that is true, there is but one course for me to pursue. Can you refute the charge?"

Overcome with rage at the evident reversal of his plans, The Rat choked a moment, while he glared at the officer. Then, shaking his fist at Ned and his companions, he burst out in a torrent of abuse.

"Those fellows are the spies!" he cried. "I can prove to you that they came from the United States to enlist in the French aviation corps, and have that other boy, who is a native of France, to help them gather information which they will sell to your enemy!"

"Startling, if true," calmly answered the officer, apparently not in the least disturbed by the statement. "But, concerning yourself, I have heard and seen quite enough to justify me in holding you for further examination on

the original charge of being a spy. Have you anything further to say on that subject?" he questioned.

"Yes, just this!" shouted The Rat, making a swift movement toward his coat pocket. "You'll never try me as a spy!"

Withdrawing his hand quickly he swung his arm, launching toward Ned the deadly stick of dynamite. Instantly he and his companion sprang away, racing across the lawn, their paths separating as they went.

Jimmie had not forgotten his baseball tactics. Just as the man swung his arm the lad jumped into the air, waving his arms. He let out a yell that would have been envied by fandom from coast to coast. It had the desired effect. The Rat's aim was spoiled.

With wonderful dexterity The Wolf leaped forward and caught the stick of dynamite in midair! Whirling about as he seized the dangerous missile, he regained his feet, holding at arm's length the object which meant destruction if The Rat had carried out his intention.

Involuntarily the little group about the officer had dodged, as they realized that the explosive thrown against the hard wall would

bring about a catastrophe in which they did not wish to share.

As Jimmie, with a grin on his freckled face, turned to deposit the missile on the table, the officer in command gave a quick order to the two guards who had accompanied The Rat and his friend Hungry.

"Get the man with the plans!"

Rifles were swung to shoulders and the two shots rang out as one. Astonished beyond measure, the little group heard a deafening explosion and saw a cloud of smoke appear where The Rat had but a moment before been running. A slow smile spread over the face of one marksman.

Hungry tripped, fell at full length, and lay as he had fallen.

Running forward, the two soldiers examined the spot where The Rat had last been seen by the little group. Shaking their heads the two men returned to the prostrate Hungry. He was helped to rise and then, supported between the pair, conducted back to the little knot of men near the castle.

"You are a good marksman," commented the officer, as the soldiers came to a halt and saluted, "but you were never furnished bul-

lets such as that one you fired just now. Where did you get it?"

"I fired a bullet from my regular supply, sir," answered the soldier, still smiling, as he lifted his hand in salute.

"There is something peculiar about this matter!" declared the officer. "When I order you to shoot a man, why should he explode?"

"I think perhaps I can explain the matter," volunteered Ned, stepping forward. Then, as the officer turned attentively toward the lad, he continued: "When the man started to run he threw, as you know, this stick of dynamite at me. I believe he had more dynamite on his person somewhere and the soldier's bullet accidentally struck it!"

"Quite reasonable!" agreed the officer. "I believe you!"

"But not by accident, sir!" interrupted the soldier. "When I saw him start away I also noticed his pocket still bulging. I suspected that he had more dynamite in there, and I aimed at the object inside his coat—and hit it!" he concluded, somewhat proudly.

"Most excellent markmanship!" was the officer's comment. "But will you tell me why you aimed at the dynamite?"

"Because I had heard these young men say, and also heard your statement that the man had plans of a fortification in his pocket. I thought that he would carry the document in a belt about his body, and that if the dynamite exploded it would destroy the plans, and thus assist the young men in their efforts to prevent their country's secrets falling into improper hands. I did not intend to disobey your orders!"

"You were very considerate," spoke up Ned, "and we appreciate your kindness very much, indeed. But you made a mistake!"

"A mistake?" questioned the soldier. "No, I shot straight!"

"You made a slight mistake, nevertheless," replied Ned. "The plans are on that man there between you two. He has them on his back!"

"It's a lie!" yelled Hungry, looking about as if speculating on his chances for making another attempt at escape.

"That man has the packet of plans that The Rat gave him not more than half an hour ago. We saw the exchange made!"

"It's a lie!" again declared Hungry. "He

had the plans all the time. They are blown to bits now, and you'll never see them!"

"How do you know this?" questioned the officer, turning to Ned.

Omitting details, Ned described the incidents leading up to the time the boys saw the exchange of plans from The Rat to Hungry in the underground room. As he finished the recital he smilled a bit and said:

"I must admit, sir, that we were really trying to get away from this place and return to the Grey Eagle. I did it, however, because I was very anxious to get to Berlin ahead of that fellow out there!"

"You are not to be blamed for your zeal!" consoled the officer kindly. "Do not blame yourself for the attempt. It shall not be remembered against you." Then turning to the soldiers he continued:

"Search this man and see if he has the packet!"

A hand was thrust down Hungry's collar and the packet brought forth. With an inconsiderate jerk the soldier broke the string and handed the parcel to his officer. Hungry's consternation was complete.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," the officer apolo-

gized to Ned and his friends. "I think I shall have to examine the contents!"

Peering over the officer's shoulder as he unfolded the contents of the little package, Ned gave a shout of joy.

"Hurrah!" he cried, jumping about. "Hurrah! The Rat fooled himself! Those are not the plans of a fortification after all!"

"What?" incredulously gasped Jimmie, pressing forward.

"Not a bit of it!" declared Ned. "This is a plan of the harbor at Colon, showing the proposed breakwater and sea wall, with locations for the scows that carried away the dirt from the Panama Canal!"

"Then they would have no value to any other country?" asked Jack.

"Not the least, except perhaps after the canal is opened to general traffic they might be useful to a captain in bringing his ship up to the entrance. But other charts will be issued of far greater value."

Gladly the boys shook hands, overjoyed to think that the efforts of The Rat had failed to bring about international difficulties between their country and any other nation.

"And now," continued the officer, as the matter seemed to be settled, "I must hasten forward. I have some disagreeable work before me, and cannot spare more time. I will, however, give you a pass that will afford you protection into neutral territory."

"Can we take the Grey Eagle with us?" queried Jimmie anxiously.

"You may dismantle it and take it as freight only," replied the officer. "We cannot allow you to operate it in this territory under the present conditions. It is too dangerous an undertaking!"

"We want to thank you for the kindness you have shown us!" declared Ned, as the officer prepared to depart. "You have been most kind!"

"I have but tried to be fair with you," was the reply. " Your example of loyalty to country and devotion to duty have been exceeded only by your bravery under trying circumstances. I shall always remember the Boy Scouts with pleasure.

Before nightfall the boys were again at their beloved Grey Eagle.

Arrangements had been made for packing

cases in which to ship the aeroplane, and in a few hours they were on their way toward Holland. From ports in that country, which was neutral territory, they would arrange to take ship for home.

"Well, I'm glad to get my face turned toward little old New York again," grinned Jimmie, as the train in which they rode bumped along.

"Just the same, I vote three cheers for those officers!" put in Jack. "They treated us finely. I like 'em all. Both the French and Germans were fine! When we get home," he continued, "the boys will be delighted to hear about the adventures that befell us when we were 'Under Fire in Flanders'!"

"Yes," added Harry, "and I'm glad the 'Musketeer's Mistake' let us start for home so quickly. I've had about enough of this fighting business. War is not a nice game!"

But the boys were not destined to reach home as quickly as they thought, neither had they seen the last of war. In fact, they had not proceeded far until they met further adventures that commanded their entire atten-

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